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CHALLENGE 52

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MegaTraveller®

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About the Cover

The more intelligent beings in this scene from the **MegaTraveller** universe mind their own business as these two shoppers work out their differences in the "Retread Shop" by Thomas Kidd.

Challenge, the magazine of science-fiction gaming, is published monthly.

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CHALLENGE

The Magazine of Science-Fiction Gaming

Twilight: 2000

6 Going on Safari

It sounded simple enough. All we had to do was go into British Columbia to look for some elephants. How hard could a couple of pachyderms be to find anyway? You just look for walking gray houses, right? Yeah, right!
Legion G. McRae and Michelle Sturgeon

MegaTraveller

16 Contact: Hhkar!

Like the Ancients, the Hhkar were considered to be a vanished race. But they have returned in force—could the Ancients do the same?
Michael R. Mikesch

26 Stalkers

Occupying only 10 systems, the Stalkers maintain a rather xenophobic state at the heart of the Hinterworlds sector.
Charles E. Gannon

Dark Conspiracy

32 Things That Go Bump in the Night

A semisentient, semicohesive mist, choking off the air supply of its victims. A giant rat trained to seek out and attack prey. A fast, durable raven which specifically targets the eyes of its quarry. This trio is sure to add a little spice to your **Dark Conspiracy** campaign.
Lester W. Smith

2300 AD

34 Operation Back Door

Episode 4: The Tricolor Conspiracy. *Charles E. Gannon*

Space: 1889

40 Dwellers in the Dark

The PCs make an unexpected discovery on the frozen dark side of Mercury in this chilling adventure.
James L. Cambias

Features

From the Management.....	4	Reviews	75
Letters from our Readers	4	Product Distribution	77
Conventions	14	Classifieds	78
Traveller News Service	24	Feedback Request	80
Cartoon	30	Next Issue	80
Briefs	31	Feedback Results	80

Table of Contents

Star Trek

48 Ferengi

Greedy, profiteering, cunning—the Ferengi have appeared as a powerful new player in the never-ending game of galactic coexistence.

James P. Gee

Ghostbusters International

52 Attack of the Ice-Age Cyborg Kamikaze Holsteins

Renegade members of the United Galactic Council plan a clandestine mission that could change the course of Terran evolution in this P-rated adventure (excessive punning). *Lester W. Smith*

NightLife

56 Urban Beasts for *NightLife*

You've seen *Night of the Living Dead*, *The Lost Boys*, and *Nightbreed*, and you've read *The Vampire Lestat* so many times you've nearly memorized it. You loved *The Howling* and *Wolfen*. You're dying (no pun intended) to roleplay an ultraslick vampire or a cagey werewolf, but most games relegate them firmly to the roles of evil NPCs. Where can you go to satisfy your craving? The answer is *NightLife* by Stellar Games.

Lester W. and Jennifer A. Smith

Tales from the Floating Vagabond

59 The Night was Fluffy

A totally off-the-wall adventure for a new comedy game by The Avalon Hill Game Company. *Nick Atlas*

Dark Future

63 Sand Cats

"Toddy has a real funny look on his face—like he's just been kicked in the gut. The case is full of credit chips, the one-shot kind with bank logos on. It all adds up. The mob is going to be awful mad at us. And when they get mad, they get worse than all the cops and all the Ops and all the other heat put together." *Graeme Davis*

Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.

68 The Beast of Boston

A new type of killer stalks old Boston. Senseless brutality on a nearly unprecedented scale had led the press to name the killer "The Beast of Boston." Police are baffled. The media have no clue. Even the Boostergangs walk in fear. Something must be done, and done soon, before the city drowns in its own blood. *Michael LaBossiere*



Page 6

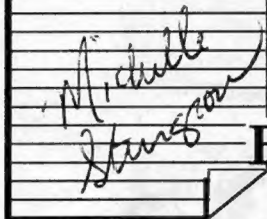


Page 16



Page 48

MEMO



From the Management

If you read the credits, you'll notice that **Challenge** has a new art director—Steve Bryant.

I congratulate him on his new title—he deserves the recognition. Historically, I was listed as art director eons ago, and nobody has been credited with the position since I became managing editor almost two years ago. But as far as I'm concerned, Steve has been art director for a long time—contributing ideas and working hard to keep the visual aspect of this magazine at the top of the field.

Now that Steve holds an official position, I'm sure his enthusiasm will be boundless. And I'm also sure that he'd love to consider new artists and new ideas to make every issue of our now-monthly magazine look better than ever.

Good luck, Steve.

CHALLENGE

SPECIAL ISSUES

I'm not a big fan of horror literature or of horror gaming, so I wasn't really looking forward to **Challenge 46** (special horror issue).

But once I got my hands on it, my opinion quickly changed.

All of the adventures and "Quicksilver Sayonara" were truly excellent. I especially liked "Contagion" and "The Tree of Souls" even though I don't play **2300 AD** or **Space: 1889** right now. Still, a seminal issue!

Has the previously announced solitaire issue been killed? I have a suggestion for **Challenge 60**: an April Fool's issue with a selection of funny, bogus articles: "Playing the Pacifist in **Twilight: 2000**," "Magic in **Mega Traveller**" and so on.

I'm delighted to hear that **Challenge** is going to be published monthly. That's good news for those of us who write. I can imagine that the expansion of GDW's game line (**Dark Conspiracy**, **Cadillacs & Dinosaurs**) made an in-

creased publication schedule for **Challenge** inevitable. Keep up the good news—and the good work!

Rich Ostorero
Sacramento, CA

*Yes, the solitaire issue idea has been abandoned due to a lack of writer interest. Special issues on the current schedule include horror (**Challenge 54**) and introductory scenarios (**Challenge 57**). I'm intrigued by the idea of a gag issue for April Fool's Day—but it has to be usable, not just entertaining. Another good suggestion I've heard is a mystery issue. And, of course, this month is our bestiary issue—we'll see what kind of response it gets.*

MORE 1889?

I am writing for several reasons.

First is to let you know how much I enjoy **Challenge** magazine and how I am looking forward to seeing **Challenge** monthly. It is one of the very few magazines that I purchase.



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Letters from our Readers

Second, I wanted to let you know how much I enjoy the GDW games that I own (**Twilight: 2000**, **Space: 1889**, **Cadillacs and Dinosaurs**, **Merc: 2000**).

Now comes the point of conflict that I have with the magazine. It seems to me that a great game like **1889** is not being given the same chance as other GDW games (I speak of **Twilight** and **MegaTraveller**). I would like to know if it is possible from time to time to add a second **1889** article by having fewer **MegaTraveller** articles. I do not wish to upset those people who enjoy **MegaTraveller** as much as I enjoy **1889**, but **MegaTraveller** is a much older game able to draw upon material from **Traveller**, the forerunner of **MegaTraveller**.

Thomas C. Gray Jr.
Clute, TX

One of our purposes in going monthly was to provide more coverage of the games our readers are most interested in.

If you're still looking for more **Space:**

1889 material, you might try the *Ether Society Newsletter*. For four issues, send your name and address, plus \$8 US and Canada (\$12 for foreign memberships) to *Ether Society*, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA.

VARIETY SHOWS INTERNATIONAL SCOPE

I have been a fairly hard-core player and referee of GDW games since I was introduced to them in '79 and '80. I have run and played **Traveller** and **Twilight** 1st edition, **MegaTraveller** and **Twilight** 2nd edition. I grumbled a little each time you came out with "the new and improved" editions.

I have also read a good number of the **JTAS** and **Challenges**, and I have seen most of the changes they have undergone. I do like some of the changes made—in particular, the expansion to cover the other game systems out there. I don't play many of them, but they have piqued my interest—in particular, **Space:**

1889 (applause for such a neat idea) and **Cyberpunk**.

It is very interesting to see the other games, opinions and variants, and to realize the truly international scope of roleplaying and boardgames, as well as the "corrections" (the Finnish weaponry letter) and the ideas which can lead to dialogue and an assuaging of stereotypes on both sides.

More power to you and a good job from this gamer, along with a cautionary "don't rest on your laurels."

Donald W. Pfoutz
Lebanon, PA

Have any comments on this issue? How about gaming in general? Letters from our Readers provides gamers an opportunity to air their views. The opinions presented do not necessarily reflect those of the magazine. **Challenge** reserves the right to edit letters. Write to **Challenge Letters**, PO Box 1646, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646 USA.

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OUT TIME DAYS is a highly interactive role-playing Play-By-Mail game with turns processed weekly. It has received excellent reviews, notably from *Flagship* and *Paper Mayhem*. Turn cost is \$5.00. The game is open ended and 99% computer moderated. The rulebook may be obtained for \$5.00 (refundable with startup). A special startup is available that gives you the rulebook, the startup turn, and five turns for only \$15.00.

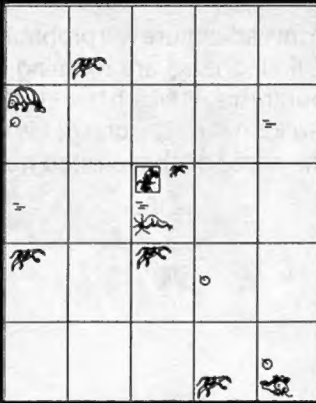


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Space Combat was designed to be easy to learn, but difficult to master. Every game starts with ten players, and as each is eliminated, the chances of the game ending will increase. Turnsheets are custom made on a laser printer to aid you in filling out your next turn. The games run about 12-18 turns. Cost is \$3.50 per turn. A rulebook (required before you can join) is \$1.00 (free if you mention this ad!).



Twin Engine Gaming; Dept 209; 3254 Maple Leaf Ct.; San Jose, CA 95121



Going On SAFARI

It sounded simple enough. All we had to do was go into British Columbia to look for some elephants. How hard could a couple of pachyderms be to find anyway? You just look for walking gray houses, right? Yeah, right!

While we were all thinking over Roberts' offer, Jones piped up, "But if they're in BC, doesn't that make them Canadian elephants? Won't that be rustling?"

Everything stopped, and we all looked at Roberts.

When he burst out laughing, everyone heaved a sigh of relief.

He hadn't flipped out!

The lower Fraser River Valley is still free of the blight of war in July 2000. The PCs, drawn by the apparent tranquility of the area, enter Bellingham, Washington for a little rest and relaxation. In the dark interior of a quiet little bar, they exchange a few words with Lieutenant Michael Roberts of the newly formed 1st Alternative Cavalry Regiment. When he learns that they have no pressing commitments at this time, he offers them a job.

The 1st Alternative Cavalry Regiment wants to conduct a reconnaissance of the Aldergrove, British Columbia area to search for elephants from the Vancouver Game Farm, Roberts explains. Divisional HQ will not sanction the mission, so Roberts is looking for outside assistance.

If they accept the mission, the PCs will travel along US Highway 539 and Canadian Highway 13 to the Vancouver Game Farm just north of Aldergrove. Roberts wants them to round up any elephants they find and bring them back to Bellingham. If the elephants have left the farm, the PCs are to attempt to track them for a week, then report back to Roberts.

Roberts says he will pay the characters one full tank of diesel for each of their vehicles if at least one elephant is brought back. If no elephants are captured, the PCs will be paid a full tank of methanol fuel for each of their vehicles.

Roberts only has 1000 liters of diesel (he pumped it out of an abandoned gas station in April). If this is not enough to fill the PCs' tanks, Roberts will make up the difference in methanol.

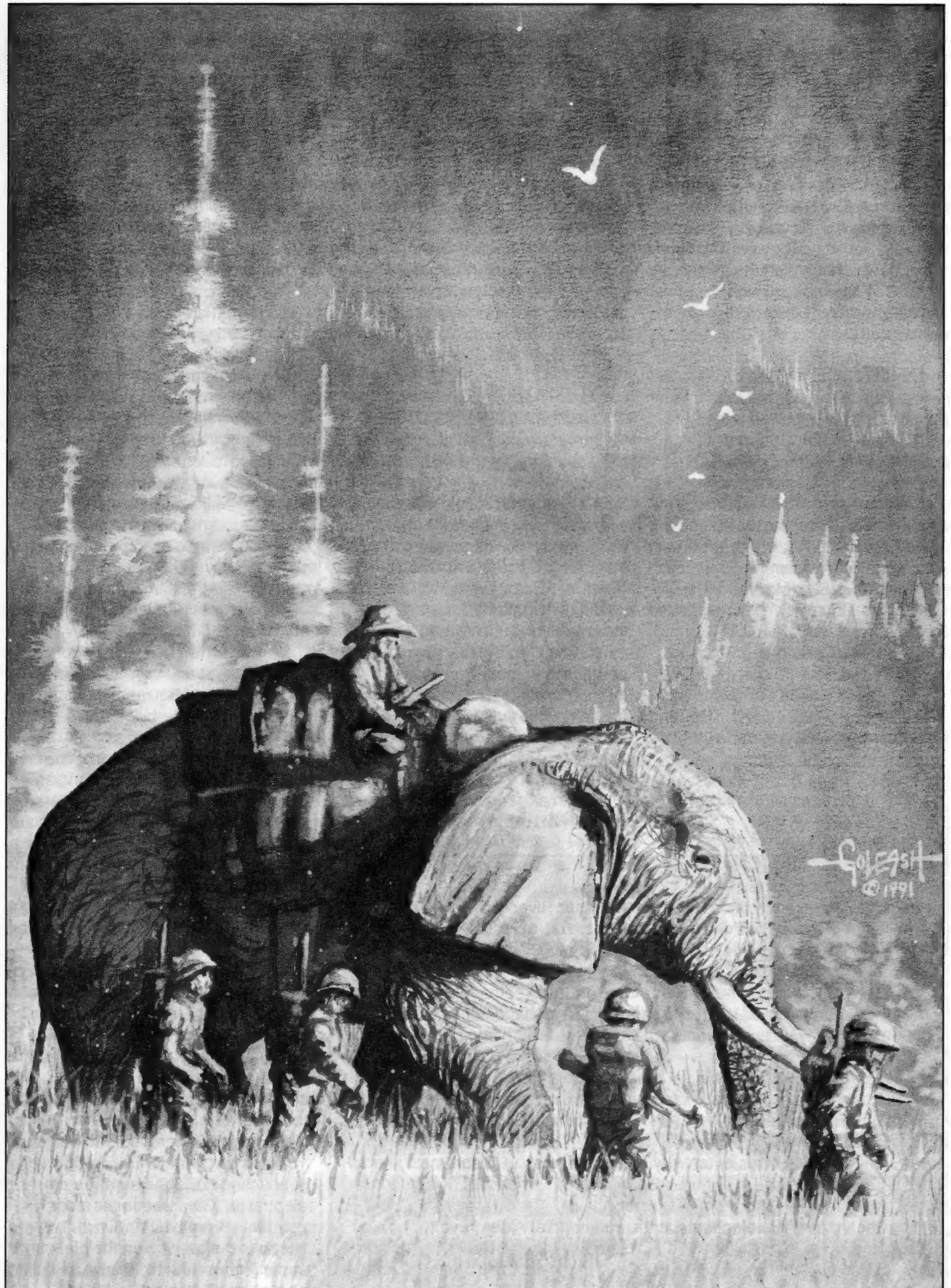
STEP RIGHT UP, FOLKS

"Safari" is set in northwest Washington and southwest British Columbia during late July or early August 2000, filling in some of the gaps on conditions in America between 1 July 2000 (the start of game time and reference date for the **American Combat Vehicle Handbook**) and 25 November 2000 (the arrival of Task Force 34 from Europe at Norfolk, Virginia as detailed in **Going Home**).

The best bet for the characters in this adventure will probably be to head toward the Vancouver Game Farm, then question people as they get close. After all, if elephants are roaming the area, someone will most likely have seen them.

The mission will require cross-country travel which by vehicle would be difficult and slow due to fuel requirements (foraging and distilling). Roberts will therefore loan the PCs one of his elephants, named Dumbo, with a three-man, flak jacket-lined howdah. (Dumbo's statistics are the same as those listed for Hephallump.) It is Roberts' hope that Dumbo will help attract

*By Legion G. McRae
and Michelle Sturgeon*



and calm any elephants the PCs discover. Roberts will also send along a mahout (driver or handler), Corporal Lewis Birch. Any PCs not riding the elephant will be loaned horses.

GET YOUR PEANUTS, POPCORN, CANDY

The characters will probably not require many supplies or equipment for the journey—just food, basic weapons, personal items, etc. Roberts will be more than happy to provide what he can from the stores of the 1st ARC. Remember, though, firepower and cargo will both be limited by what the animals can carry.

IN THE CENTER RING...

The PCs are most likely civilians or members of the following units:

US Army: 47th Infantry Division (Washington and Idaho), 104th Infantry Division (Light) (Montana).

Canadian Army: 3/C-SCOT-R (British Columbia), 1/Regina Rifle Regiment (British Columbia), 1/Rocky Mountain Rangers (British Columbia).

Soviet Army: 62nd Motorized Rifle Division (British Columbia), 120th Motorized Rifle Division (British Columbia), 76th Tank Division (British Columbia).

ENCOUNTERS

Use encounter tables found in **Howling Wilderness** for running this adventure.

New Americans: Prior to 1 January 2001, any New Americans encountered will be discreet reconnaissance teams and will look like groups of refugees. These patrols will be made up of 2D6 personnel, both male and female, armed with an array of easily concealable weaponry.

Rumors: During their travels in northern Washington and southern British Columbia, the PCs will encounter people with a variety of information. Roll 1D6: on a 1-2, the person encountered has heard no rumors; 3-4, one rumor; 5-6, two rumors. To determine which rumors a person knows, roll 2D6 and consult the Rumors Table.

RUNNING THE ADVENTURE

The referee can fill in the details of the adventure as the PCs make their way toward Vancouver. With some detective work and a little intuition, they will probably get the idea that the elephants have migrated from the Vancouver Game Farm to Fort Langley. Then, a meeting with Willie or some tracking will take them on to the Fort Langley National Historic Park. The most difficult part of the adventure, and perhaps the most humorous, will be treating the injured elephant's wounds and taking the two back to Roberts and the 1st ACR.

ORGANIZATIONS

Referees may determine troop locations and specific weapons of organizations encountered.

1st Alternative Cavalry Regiment

This unit was formally organized in May of 2000. What makes it unique is that instead of relying on tanks and APCs for transportation, members of the 1st ride elephants.

The elephants, originally belonging to the Bishop Brothers Circus, were set free in Bellingham in late 1999 when the crew and performers fled into the countryside. Many of the animals died in the intervening months. Roberts found the elephants grazing in a field in April and rounded them up with the aid of an infantry platoon subordinate to the 47th Infantry Division.

In May Roberts went to the divisional HQ with his idea for an elephant-borne "cavalry" unit—and was surprised to find his idea readily accepted.

Roberts was given command of the 1st Alternative Cavalry Regiment. Including leaders, the regiment consists of 45 members (20 Veteran, 15 Experienced and 10 Novice NPCs).

Meeting the 1st ACR: Patrols may be encountered anywhere within 50 or 60 kilometers of Bellingham, Washington. The regiment is billeted in the northern reaches of Bellingham.

Weapons and Equipment: The regiment rides a "fleet" of nine Indian elephants. A mahout rides on each elephant's neck, and two other men are carried in a howdah mounted on each animal's back. Other regiment members ride horses.

The men are armed with an assortment of small arms, and the group possesses eight night vision devices (three image intensifiers, four IR goggles and one starlight scope), plus a few heavy weapons (M203s and M60s). All the men and all the elephants have body armor.

Each elephant wears a "coat" of interconnected Kevlar vests as a makeshift barding covering everything but the lower legs. Use the Human/Animal Hit Location (Quadruped) Table on page 198 of 2nd edition **Twilight: 2000** when conducting fire against the regiment's elephants. On forequarter and hind-quarter hits, roll 1D10. On a 1-5, the shot hits the barding on the elephant's upper leg; on a 6-10, the shot hits the animal's unprotected lower leg.

Rumors

Roll Rumor

2	I heard some kind of awful shrieking while I was moving south, over near Langley.
3	Foreigners have been seen in the Fraser River Valley, especially at night. No one knows what they're up to.
4	Cannibals have moved into the river valley. If you want to keep your head, you'd better stay away.
5	Some kind of cult has taken over Fort Langley park. People keep disappearing, and everyone's heard strange screams, especially at night. They've even seen spirits or ghosts or something
6	Some kind of monster rampaged through Langley just last month. I hear some guy was killed. I'd stay away if I were you.
7	A bunch of escaped convicts have taken over Aldergrove. And they're out for revenge!
8	There's no getting north out of this valley. Chilliwack's nuke saw to that.
9	There are all kinds of tanks lying around north of Clearbrook.
10	Elephants? Sure there are elephants around here. I saw a bunch of them myself over near Clearbrook.
11	I heard they got elephants at the zoo north of Aldergrove
12	People have been avoiding Fort Langley lately. No one seems sure why.

Aldergrove Militia

The Aldergrove Militia is composed of civilians (citizen-soldiers) led by a small number of Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).

The militia has a hatred for the Razorbacks and will harass or arrest anyone suspected of belonging to the gang.

RCMP Staff Sergeant Bruce Colts commands the militia under the authority of Mayor Rousseau. Including leaders, the group consists of 100 members (20 Veteran, 50 Experienced and 30 Novice NPCs).

Meeting the Militia: The Aldergrove Militia can be encountered anywhere within 10 kilometers of the town of Aldergrove. The maintain vigorous patrols of the nearby countryside.

Weapons and Equipment: Militia members are armed with a variety of civilian and police small arms (sporting and assault rifles, shotguns, revolvers and automatic pistols). Half also wear police-issue body armor. They are dressed in a wide assortment of military combat uniforms obtained from local army surplus stores and from elements of the 47th Infantry Division during that unit's withdrawal south in late-1998.

Matsqui Razorbacks

The Razorbacks are a marauder gang composed of ex-convicts from the Matsqui Penitentiary and people recruited since the gang formed. Tom "Fang" Strakes is the maniacal leader. Those in his inner circle are all escaped cons, while most of the lower ranking members are recent additions. Including their leaders, the group consists of 130 members (40 Veteran, 60 Experienced and 30 Novice NPCs). The Razorbacks hole up in the Matsqui Penitentiary.

The Razorbacks have adopted as their standard a blood-soaked, inverted British Columbia provincial flag.

Meeting the Razorbacks: The Razorbacks can be encountered anywhere west of the ruins of Canadian Forces Base (CFB) Chilliwack. They patrol (raid) throughout the southern bank areas of the Fraser River, as far south as Sumas.

Weapons and Equipment: The Razorbacks are armed with a wide assortment of civilian and police weapons (sporting rifles, shotguns, revolvers, a few assault rifles and automatic pistols). A few members (Fang among

them) have police-issue body armor. Most wear civilian clothes, although some take a sick pride in wearing their old prison uniforms.

INTRODUCING...

Presented below are a number of people the PCs may encounter in this adventure.

Lt. Michael K. Roberts

Roberts was born and raised in Houston, Texas. When he finished high school, he went to the University of Texas where he studied business management. He had just finished his doctoral studies when the US entered the war in late-1996.

He enlisted in February of 1997, went through officer training, and in late 1997 was placed as a supply officer in the 10th Infantry Division (Mountain), then in Alaska.

After being cut off from his unit by the Soviet offensive of early 1998, Roberts made his way south. In northern Washington in March 2000 he linked up with elements of the 47th Infantry Division, then in cantonment in Bellingham. In May he was put in command of the newly formed 1st Alternative Cavalry Regiment.

Roberts is an Experienced NPC. He speaks English (10) and Russian (4).

NPC Motivation Results: *Heart 7:* Roberts is a dedicated leader has strong feelings of responsibility for the men and animals of his command. *Diamond 3:* One of the reasons he went into business management was to make money. He is ambitious and assertive, yet not unaware of the feelings of his fellow man.

Corporal Lewis Birch

Birch hails from Eagle Grove, Iowa, and served the entire war in the Pacific Northwest. He has been a member of the 34th Infantry Brigade of the 47th Infantry Division since it was called into federal service in November 1996. When his new friend Lieutenant Roberts found the circus elephants in April 2000, Birch immediately offered to help him round them up. Now Birch is one of Roberts' best mahouts and a dedicated "elephanteer."

Birch is a Veteran NPC. He speaks English (10).

NPC Motivation Results: *Spade 5:* Birch is not an unkind man, but deep down he feels he should have been

TWILIGHT: 2000

given command of the 1st ACR. After all, he is more familiar with the men in the 47th than Roberts. *Heart 6:* He is friendly to everyone he meets and remains Roberts' friend.

Sheila Ford

Sheila Tompkins grew up in Vancouver and attended the University of British Columbia where she studied to be a veterinarian. At UBC she also met Greg Ford, another veterinary student, whom she married in her senior year. Once she and Greg completed their studies, they moved to Aldergrove, where she got a job at the Vancouver Game Farm. Greg was in the city on business when Vancouver was nuked in December of 1997, but she has never received confirmation of his death. She lives in Aldergrove with her daughter, Jaci, who is 20 years old.

Ford met Roberts when he first discovered the elephants and was instantly attracted to him. Her love of Roberts and of animals both motivate her interest in the well-being of the 1st ACR. If the PCs find the elephants and it becomes apparent that one is injured, they could easily enlist Ford's aid in treating the afflicted animal.

Ford is a 44-year-old Novice NPC. She speaks English (10) and Latin (5).

NPC Motivation Results: *Heart Queen:* Ford has always loved animals and is intensely drawn to Roberts. *Heart 2:* Ford likes a good conversation and is very talkative.

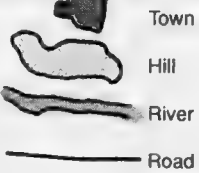
Mayor Walt Rousseau

Rousseau had just won the Aldergrove mayoral election in 1996 when the war started in Europe, involving Canada. The first year of the war went uneventfully in Aldergrove. Then, in late 1997, disaster struck! The nukes wasted Vancouver and Chilliwack, and strikes occurred in northern Washington to the south of the valley.

Reading the writing on the wall, Mayor Rousseau, with the aid of the local RCMP detachment, assumed practically dictatorial powers. He ordered the town closed, organized a civil militia,

Aldergrove and Environs

Key



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539

Aldergrove

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Matsqui
Penitentiary

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Abbotsford

Huntingdon

Sumas

Cloverdale

Langley

Fort Langley

Fort Langley NHP

Haney

Mission

Only major highways and roads are shown, although lesser roads crisscross the whole lower Fraser Valley. All highways and roads are fully paved and at least two lanes wide. Copses and rows of trees (mostly deciduous varieties) border fields, roads, buildings and creek beds throughout this agricultural area.

had obstacles and wire entanglements erected, and instituted stricter rationing of resources. Then the town waited.

When the seas of refugees broke upon Aldergrove's barriers, the town held.

Now that the refugees have, for the most part, moved on, Rousseau has relaxed rationing to a degree and has opened Aldergrove to small-scale trade.

Rousseau is an Experienced NPC. He speaks English (10), French (9), and German (5).

NPC Motivation Results: *Spade Ace:* Rousseau is a very popular man in and around Aldergrove. He is a natural leader. *Heart 3:* Walt is very protective of "his people," and won't hesitate to act against any strangers who seem to threaten the town.

Tom "Fang" Strakes

Strakes was found guilty of the brutal murder of the Willis family on May 15, 1991. He was sentenced to five consecutive terms of life imprisonment at the Matsqui Penitentiary.

After Vancouver and Chilliwack were vaporized on the December 28, 1997, many of the prison's guards stopped showing up for work. Those that did continue working were overpowered by a mass prison break, orchestrated by Strakes, early in January 1998. Once out, most of the prisoners dispersed into the countryside south of the Fraser River.

Some few, however, remained together and formed a gang.

Strakes claimed to be the gang's leader and murdered all contenders, and he has been in that position ever since. It was Strakes who named the gang the Razorbacks. He was given the nickname of "Fang" by the other members of the Razorback because of his pronounced eye-teeth. Fang is obsessed with death and occasionally tortures and murders prisoners just to watch their pain.

Fang is a large (6'3", 240 lbs.), powerfully built man. His upper body is covered in blue-ink tattoos.

Fang is a Veteran NPC and is 32 years old. He speaks English (8).

NPC Motivation Results: *Club King:* Strakes is a homicidal maniac and wouldn't give a second thought about the use of violence anywhere! *Spade Queen:* Fang never takes no for an answer.

Willie

Willie is the sole inhabitant of Fort Langley. He is half-crazed hermit who will be only too happy to chat with the PCs for awhile. If asked about elephants, he will relate the following tale:

I got here about, let's see—five or six, no not that long, must be two years ago. There wasn't any animals here then. Just me and Bessie—that's my horse. She's a gone now, though.

Anyway, I did see me an elephant once. Must a been about a month ago. No, more like last week. I don't know. He was a headed towards the river—just a runnin' and a trumpetin'—'bout scared poor Bessie ta death.

I weren't scared, though. I tried ta follow him fer a spell. But he headed towards the park, and nobody wants to go there after dark. Everybody knows that place is haunted.

Willie's age is hard to guess, but he's well over 80, probably over 90. He is a Novice NPC and speaks English (8).

NPC Motivation Results: *Diamond Ace:* Willie would give you the shirt off his back. Unfortunately, he doesn't have a shirt to give. *Heart 7:* He likes living alone but is most willing to spin a tale for friendly travellers.

Elephants

Hephalump is a bull Indian elephant, and Woozle is a cow. Woozle is quite sick. About a week ago, a hunter wandered into Fort Langley National Park and surprised the two elephants. He fired a shot from his rifle at Woozle, wounding her. Shortly thereafter, the hunter was killed in an encounter with Hephalump.

Woozle's wound wasn't very bad initially, but now it's infected. Anyone can see that she won't make the trip back to Bellingham without a veterinarian's care. The elephants are friendly, but they are scared and confused. A PC should be able to befriend them if he is quiet, gentle and slow-moving. A nice handful of grass wouldn't hurt either! Dumbo, the elephant Roberts loans the PCs, and his mahout will also help befriend the animals.

Hephalump: *Meat:* 1D6×80 kg *Move:* 10(15)/30 # *Appearing:*— *Hits:* 60 *Attack:* 20% *Hit #:* 4 *Damage:* 5D6 *CON:* 26.

Woozle: *Meat:* 1D6×80 kg *Move:* 10(5)/15(8)/30 (no charge possible) # *Appearing:*— *Hits:* 60(30) *Attack:* 20% *Hit #:* 4(2) *Damage:* 5D6(3D6) *CON:* 26 (13).

TWILIGHT: 2000

The entries in parentheses are Woozle's current, wounded ratings. With the proper care, she will be able to get back up to her full statistics again.

PLACES OF INTEREST

Below are descriptions of the locations in and around the lower Fraser River Valley.

Abbotsford and Clearbrook

These two towns, which have grown together, were devastated by the hordes of refugees streaming east after the nuclear attack on Vancouver on December 28, 1997. Looting, rape and murder drove out the inhabitants who survived, and the towns are now almost completely abandoned. The Razorbacks use them as supply centers to supplement their rapine of nearby settlements and travellers.

A small settlement in the northeast corner of Abbotsford has so far been able to fend off the ravages of the refugees and Razorbacks. Approximately 300 people live in what they call North Abbotsford.

Anyone entering Abbotsford or Clearbrook will meet 3D6 Razorbacks on a 2D6 roll of 1-7. Razorbacks encountered will attack—unless they are obviously outnumbered or outclassed.

Aldergrove

The town of Aldergrove is under the sway of Mayor Walter Rousseau. In January 1998, he assumed almost dictatorial powers and organized the citizens into an effective militia using the local RCMP detachment as a cadre.

When the sea of refugees from Vancouver arrived, they were faced by strong obstacles patrolled by armed guards. After trying unsuccessfully to bulldoze into the town by sheer numbers, they moved on to Abbotsford instead.

Now Aldergrove has a shaky trading system established with what is left of Langley, and the militia will allow small groups of people inside. About 900 people now live in the town of Aldergrove.

Matsqui Penitentiary

This prison was built to hold maximum-security convicts. When the war went nuclear, the inmates staged a takeover and broke out. The penitentiary is now the home of the Matsqui Razorbacks, a gang of escaped convicts who have recruited some new members.

Anyone coming within two kilometers of the prison will encounter 3D6 Razorbacks on a 2D6 roll of 1-8. Razorbacks encountered will attack—unless they are obviously outnumbered or outclassed.

Vancouver Game Farm

The now deserted game farm is located about three kilometers north of Aldergrove. The animals there were decimated by the refugees from the west in January 1998. Those that survived, including two Indian elephants, fled into the countryside. The elephants have moved gradually west and are currently sheltering in a large copse immediately to the east of the Fort Langley National Historic Park.

Langley

Large tracts of Langley were razed during the refugee migrations in late

1997 and early 1998. But the eastern parts of the town, including the small airport, were spared because the citizens there fought the refugees to a standstill more than once in running battles through the city.

Now, about 500 people live in Langley's eastern quarter. They conduct trade with Aldergrove and with the few travelling merchants brave enough to wander the valley.

Langley possesses a functioning DNC-6 Twin Otter aircraft, 1100 liters of avgas, and pilots, parts and mechanics to maintain and fly it. The citizens will use their secret weapon only as a last resource to save the town. They have dynamite, grenades, and Molotov cocktails stocked up to drop as bombs.

For details of the DNC-6 Twin Otter, see "Air Module II" in **Challenge 28**.

Fort Langley

The small town of Fort Langley was obliterated by the seas of refugees which flowed over the valley in 1997 and 1998. Many of the buildings are gutted from fire. Many more are simply abandoned. Most are broken down.

The sole occupant of Fort Langley is Willie, a friendly but half-crazed old her-

mit, is the home of Hephalump and Woosle, the two Indian elephants from the Vancouver Game Farm.

Nobody from Fort Langley will go near the park, which is situated northeast of the town, because of all the "unholy screaming" coming from the place.

NEW SKILLS

This adventure is based upon the ability of people to use animals, sometimes exotic ones, for different sorts of work. The skills required to do this are not available in **Twilight: 2000** game rules, so two new skills are presented here.

Animal Training and Handling (INT)

Ability to break (if necessary), train, and handle various types of animals. It is suggested that the only animals this skill should be usable on are elephants, horses, dogs, camels and homing pigeons. When this skill is taken, the animal it applies to should be specified, and the skill may be taken more than once for a character to work with more than one type of animal.

Veterinarian (EDU)

Ability to render first aid/medical care to injured or ill animals. If used to treat humans, add one difficulty level to all tasks.

CONCLUSION

If the players are interested in an ongoing campaign in the Vancouver area, the referee could link this adventure to another **Twilight** adventure, "Red Maple," previously published in **Challenge**. The referee would simply need to give the PCs a reason for going to Vancouver Island and equip them with a small boat.

For more information, see "Red Maple" in **Challenge 36**. Ω

Maps of the Fraser Valley and the rest of southern British Columbia can be obtained from: Tourism British Columbia, Parliament Buildings, Victoria, B.C., V8V 1X4, Canada.

Maps of northern Washington state may be obtained from: Washington State Dept. of Trade and Economic Development, 101 General Admin. Bldg., AX-13, Olympia, WA 98504.

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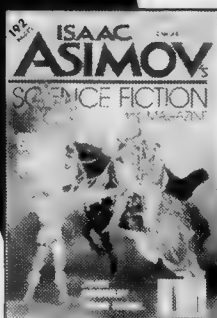
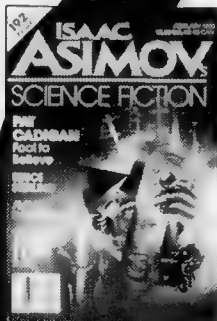
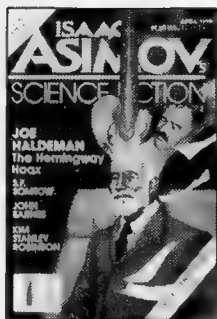
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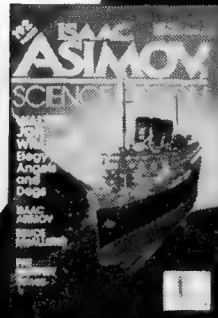
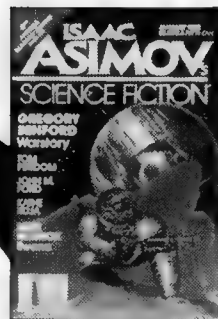
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ORGANIZED KAHN-FUSION III, August 10-11 at the New Villa Inn in New Cumberland, PA. Write to M. Foner's Games Only Emporium, 200 Third St., New Cumberland, PA 17070.

VIKINGCON XII, August 16-18 at Western Washington University. Write to VikingCon XII, Western Washington University, Viking Union 202, Box V-1, Bellingham, WA 98225.

GATEWAY 11, August 30-September 2 at the LAAirport Hilton Hotel. Contact Strategicon, PO Box 8399, Long Beach, CA 90808.

TACTICON, September 13-15 at the Ramada Hotel of Denver/Boulder. For information, contact the Denver Gamers Association, PO Box 440058, Aurora, CO 80044.

ANDCON, September 13-15 at the Holiday Inn Hudson in Hudson, Ohio. Write to AndCon, PO Box 142, Kent, OH 44240-0003.

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21st EMPEROR'S BIRTHDAY GAME, September 14 at the Century Center in downtown South Bend, IN, across from the Marriott Hotel. Contact Mark Schumaker, PO Box 252, Elkhart, IN 46515.

OUTSIDE-CON 4, Sept. 20-22 at Montgomery Bell State Resort Park in Dickson, TN. Contact BAND HQ, PO Box 835, St. Bethlehem, TN 37155.

VALLEYCON 16, September 27-29 at the Regency Inn in Moorhead, MN. Write to Valleycon 16, POB 7202, Fargo, ND 58109.

Concord, NH). For more information, you can write to Denise Keller, c/o Econolodge, 1 Keewayden Dr., Salem, NH 03079.

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NOVAG VI, October 26-27 at the Elks Lodge in Sterling, VA (Route 50 and 495). For more information, write to NOVAG VI, c/o Wargamers Hobby, 101 E. Holly Ave., Suite 5, Sterling, VA 22170.

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LAGACON-12, November 9 at Kasper's Ark (five miles north of Lebanon, PA on Route 72). Write to Lebanon Area Gamers, 806 Cumberland St., Lebanon, PA 17042.

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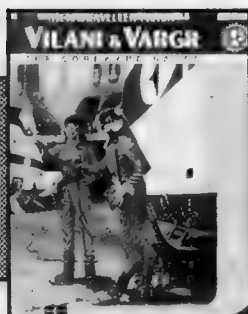
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CONTACT:



Like the Ancients, the Hhkar were considered to be a vanished race.

But the Hhkar returned in force, an event scholars never considered possible.

Could the Ancients do the same?

By Michael R. Mikes

Scout ships venturing to the coreward sectors at the end of the Long Night heard vague stories of wars with a race of "fire breathing dragons," and contact specialists in the Vargr Enclaves described "lizardoids" or "saurians."

Records made no mention of such a species in that part of what was once settled Imperial territory, and the first scout missions sent to contact the "dragons" never returned. Imperials instead learned what they could of the beings through other inhabitants in that part of space.

According to Vargr in Amdukan sector, huge sublight ships arrived at the Urinir system in -222 and laid siege to Urinir. At first, the newcomers were held off by the technologically superior Vargr. But the ships kept coming in a seemingly unending stream from coreward. The Vargr and remaining human inhabitants surrendered after three years, but even then the ships kept coming.

Urinir was but a backwater world during the First Imperium, known for its extensive pyramid ruins. From similar ruins on neighboring worlds, xenoarchaeologists knew the original race was spacefaring, but believed it died out as a result of a plague. We now know the race migrated en masse, but we do not know why. Just as mysteriously, they returned, over 10,000 years later in -222.

HHKAR!

PHYSIOLOGY

The Hhkar is an impressive life form for its size and apparent strength. Having evolved from a reptile-like carnivore/killer, the modern Hhkar is roughly humanoid in appearance and possesses a heavy tail for balance. The hands have three fingers, with opposable thumbs for grasping. Short, semiretractable claws on each finger are treated as claws +1. The thick skin, fatty muscles and tiny scales give the saurian the equivalent of jack (armor rating 1).

Eight subspecies are known in Amdukan sector. Others may exist in other parts of space, but so far have not been encountered.

Vocalization: Hhkar speech uses hisses, growls, coughs, hacking, snarls and sharp inhalation or exhalation. Their vocal equipment consists of a complex system of tissues in their throat which generates a wide variety of sounds. They seldom use their lips—while they are speaking, their mouths are left ajar. Some words require a sound made by snapping the jaws shut, represented in writing by a "!". Although they can understand human languages with training, they cannot speak them. Conversely, humans cannot speak the Hhkar language and have difficulty representing it in a written form.

Respiration: Although the Hhkar breathe oxygen, they are renowned for their adaptability to atmospheres. Their homeworld (called Ssrar in legend) possessed extreme levels of sulfur compounds. Climatic and geological instabilities varied the concentrations from insidious to merely exotic levels, and sometimes added other taints. Having evolved under these conditions, the Hhkar can live in atmospheres breathable by humans if they take precautions to preserve their health. But they prefer worlds with atmospheres at least tainted with sulfur compounds.

Smoking: The story that Hhkar breathe fire probably stems from the fact that they smoke heavily—and must do so. The tainted atmosphere of their original homeworld provided many of the nutrients and minerals they needed. But its composition was unstable, so proto-Hhkar learned to supplement their diet by burning and breathing the smoke from certain vegetation, sometimes treated with minerals. Later, they developed the practice of smoking for nutrition, medicine and pleasure. Smoking also took the place of eating as a social function. On Ssrar, food dissolved in minutes in the corrosive atmosphere, so animals had to be eaten immediately after slaughter. Smoking, however, was more leisurely, offering an opportunity for Hhkar to gather and socialize. Smoking grew into a social custom—and its functional importance increased even more once the Hhkar began

settling worlds with alien environments. Other species often find the scent of the concoctions smoked to be disagreeable.

Smoking, among the Hhkar, is a pastime rich in customs and varying tastes. Many of these traditional forms have been adopted by citizens of the Julian Protectorate and the Domain of Antares. It's not unusual for Hhkar to own large plantations growing a variety of plants for their use. They also grow tobacco and related plants for trade with humans and Vargr. Hhkar do not find opiates pleasurable, so they never grow opium and like plants, at least not for themselves.

Life Cycle: Hhkar begin life as an egg, hatching after about 21 weeks.

Juveniles are light of frame, and possess greater speed and agility than adults. Unlike human children, they do not play. Instead, they begin work within weeks of hatching, with older juveniles supervising and teaching the younger. Hhkar reach maturity at age 22, reaching 2.5 meters in height and 250 kilograms in weight.

Hhkar all begin as males, then transform into females later in life. They can apparently change gender at will, sometimes cycling from one gender to another up to six times throughout their life span. Although preceded by a variety of subtle biochemical changes, sexual transformation only takes a few days and involves the shedding of skin.

Approximately once a year, females enter estrus and mate, laying clutches of one to six eggs. Hhkar are not monogamous and do not establish permanent relationships. Hhkar usually lay their eggs in a heavily guarded communal area called *ahr!guuht'k* (caves of life). These are usually building complexes near the center of the community dedicated to the care of eggs.

Females oversee the activities of juveniles. Although they will protect the juveniles with their lives, they exhibit no signs of affection and give no special treatment to their own young. They sometimes kill individuals judged deformed, slow to learn, or difficult to control.

Being a violent race, Hhkar frequently die in conflicts among *ssaaahk* (family groups) before the end of their natural life spans. Those that do grow old, though, do not suffer the physical effects of old age, thanks to the renewing process involved in changing gender. Reports of Hhkar living for centuries, some for over a millennia, led Imperial scouts to think the race was nearly immortal. This, however, is not true. Hhkar generally live almost 200 years—but most of their actual life spans they spend in natural suspended animation. Although they can enter this state of suspended animation at will, younger Hhkar seldom do. Those that sur-

vive to old age, though, do so with increasing regularity and duration. This has served Hhkar society by bringing the knowledge and experience of past generations forward in time. Generally, elderly Hhkar die while in a state of suspension and by their own will, according to the Hhkar.

Senses: Hearing is not as acute among Hhkar as it is among humans, and Hhkar have no sense of smell as such. Instead, they "taste" the air with their highly developed tongues. Hhkar can see further into the infrared spectrum than can humans, but blue light is invisible to them. They also have a highly developed magnetic sense, useful in the environment of their metal-rich homeworld. Magnetic-sensitive lines extend from the brain along the full length of the limbs and tail, along the chest, and around the head.

Hhkar generate small but complex magnetic fields. By their magnetic sense alone, Hhkar can distinguish one individual from another more easily than humans can identify associates by voice. Hhkar can also readily determine each other's physical and mental states via these fields.

PSYCHE

The Hhkar mind can shift between a wide variety of states, which can be triggered by a combination of stimuli such as warmth, light, dampness, sound or taste. These might occur in nature, or might be purposefully created to induce a specific mental state.

Some of the *waking states* include a learning mode, combat mode or zombie (laborer) mode. Each mode is unique, and a Hhkar in one state can appear to be a completely different being from himself in another state.

Gender, to a certain extent, is a state of consciousness. An individual Hhkar might have certain knowledge and skills while in one gender, and a completely different set of knowledge and skills in the other gender. "Gender-specific" knowledge and skills will be lost when an individual changes gender but will be regained when he switches back again. Therefore, gender shifts are often delayed until after a Hhkar's career.

Hhkar can also enter a wide variety of *dream states*. These serve as recreation, aid in decision making and learning, and provide spiritual insight. Hhkar generally spend much of their time asleep, in one dream state or another.

Unlike most sophonts, Hhkar do not naturally cycle regularly between being asleep and awake, but instead sleep when it suits them. Observers have noted that Hhkar sleep long and often, but can go without sleep for many days with apparently no loss of ability. Still, they can schedule their sleep to coincide with any regular pattern if the situation calls for it.

A close relationship exists between the Hhkar mind and body, more so than in humans. Alter the Hhkar body, and you can alter the mind. Alter the Hhkar mind, and you alter the body. Thus, the Hhkar may use physical stimuli to help them enter the more difficult states of consciousness.

Conversely, Hhkar medicine depends heavily on the patient's mental state. Individuals skilled in medical techniques know how to use the mind to manipulate the metabolism to lieu of drugs. Some methods look like hypnosis, while others seem like tribal rituals. Suspended animation is even used for an individual awaiting special care. Despite appearances, "mental medicine" is surprisingly effective against a variety of ailments and injuries.

Hhkar rarely use drugs. In many cases, the imbalance between the mind and body brought on by a drug will cause the Hhkar mind to plummet into one of many nightmare states the Hhkar call hell.

It is not known whether Hhkar can be trained in psionics. They believe psionics pervert the soul by turning it inside out. While psionics allow the spirit to interact with the temporal world, it is forever barred from the higher planes. When a psionic dreams, he can only enter the "hells," which do not seem terrible to him because of the perversion of his own soul. Hhkar will react violently toward anyone known to be a psionic.

RELIGION

The many religions of the Hhkar all involve planes of spiritual existence, but they differ in the specific planes they focus on, theological interpretations and means of achieving these planes. An approximate religious profile for the Hhkar religions collectively would be: 865988-A (see *World Builder's Handbook*, Digest Group Publications, 1989).

Hhkar believe their dream lives are as valid as their waking lives and have religious significance. According to their theology, through death they may retire to one of these "higher planes" until they choose to reincarnate. They also believe in "lower planes," states of consciousness that leave them at least aware of the real world, although with different perceptions. This makes normal reality the lowest plane of all, yet it remains perhaps the most important since it is the junction at which all other planes meet.

Pahhkirs (priests) serve as guides for the devout, helping them to reach the appropriate states of consciousness. By using their magnetic sense and their bodily fields, the priests can successfully instruct others where mere words and illustrations would fail. Their task is made easier when, during gatherings, the fields generated by other

knowledgeable members also serve as guides.

SOCIETY

The Hhkar species is not native to Amdukan sector, having arrived there aboard armadas of sublight ships. The culture adapted to that environment after many centuries in interstellar space. To this day, a significant percentage of Hhkar prefer to reside in space habitats rather than on the world. Many of these habitats are jump capable, letting entire communities continue their star-wandering lifestyle, although usually within the confines of the Hhkar Sphere.

Hhkar base their society around the *ssaaahk*, a group which has common racial or familial characteristics. Each individual places the needs of his *ssaaahk* well above his own needs and obeys without hesitation the orders from the patriarch of his *ssaaahk*. The patriarch has absolute authority over the affairs of the *ssaaahk*, controlling the use of all lands, buildings, vehicles, companies and other resources.

Certain physical features characterize each *ssaaahk*. *Ssaaahk* members born without the proper features are usually killed as juveniles, and those that survive to adulthood are ejected from the *ssaaahk*. These are known as the *raaabr*, individuals who belong to no *ssaaahk*. They have lower status in Hhkar society and usually serve in the employ of a *ssaaahk*.

Individuals among the *raaabr* who exhibit characteristics associated with a *ssaaahk* other than the one they were born into may petition that alternate *ssaaahk* for membership. It usually takes generations before they can attain that status.

Males dominate Hhkar society in the role of warriors, diplomats, travelers, and decision makers. Females remain in the background, rearing young and performing lesser services within the Hhkar community. This is not truly chauvinistic since all Hhkar alternate between the two genders.

Instinct guides the Hhkar into their new roles after a gender shift, and where instinct falls short, society fills in. Many Hhkar behavioral cues are transmitted and discerned by their magnetic sense. Non-Hhkar find these cues difficult to discern, even with electronic aids.

Honor: Hhkar males will defend their honor fiercely, ensuring that adequate recognition be given to an individual's prestige. Failure to accord honor where it is due can lead to combat, although seldom to the death. Because social cues are often transmitted via the magnetic sense, visitors may be surprised to see two males apparently spontaneously grapple, falling to the ground biting and clawing, seemingly without provocation. Oddly, Hhkar bystanders take no

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notice of the event, and the participants act as if nothing happened once the confrontation is resolved.

Honor and prestige play an important role in obtaining the right to mate, which is usually judged by communal consensus. Specific procedures differ among *ssaaahk* and individual communities.

Conflict: Conflicts among *ssaaahk* are quite common and take many lives. The interstellar government, however, imposes rules and limits on such feuding. In most situations, the only weapons used are small arms.

GOVERNMENT

Eight major *ssaaahk*, known as the Patriarchy, form the top of a pyramid government, with lower-ranking *ssaaahk* dominating those ranked lower still. The patriarch of each *ssaaahk* holds a good measure of power and freedom to act in the interests of his family's well-being and honor. But the eight major *ssaaahk* hold ultimate authority in overseeing the interests of the Hhkar Sphere as a whole.

This governmental structure parallels the Aslan in many ways. But while the Aslan *Tlaukhu* is not a true governing body, the Hhkar Patriarchy is. It retains control of the Hhkar Navy (astroguard) and ground forces (planetguard), and enforces its will over all Hhkar. It also reserves the right to conduct diplomatic relations outside of the sphere, although diplomats are never members of a major *ssaaahk*.

HISTORY

The Hhkar is a species older than humanity, having achieved civilization about -75,000 and space flight around -50,000. Xenohistorians have reconstructed an early history through deductive reasoning, largely based on Hhkar religious writings and traditional stories. According to the best reconstructive hypotheses, the homeworld, *Ssra*, is a geologically violent planet. The earliest *ssaaahk* might have stayed in one place for decades or centuries. But as conditions changed, they had little time to adapt, so they instead migrated to lands more suited to their lifestyle, letting a more suitable *ssaaahk* occupy the lands they vacated. Despite their transient nature, the developing Hhkar tended to build permanent structures that could endure the harsh environment. Even if they abandoned these structures for centuries, they might return to

Hikaru Subsector

This subsector has a long history of war involving the Hhkar, and the Hhkar Sphere encompasses most of the subsector. Only four other Hhkar worlds lie outside of Hikaru, all in Urru (subsector H).

Today, the Hhkar Sphere is a member of confederation of the Julian Protectorate and is at peace with its neighbors. Still, the Julian Star Legion maintains a large naval base at Kargar as assurance.

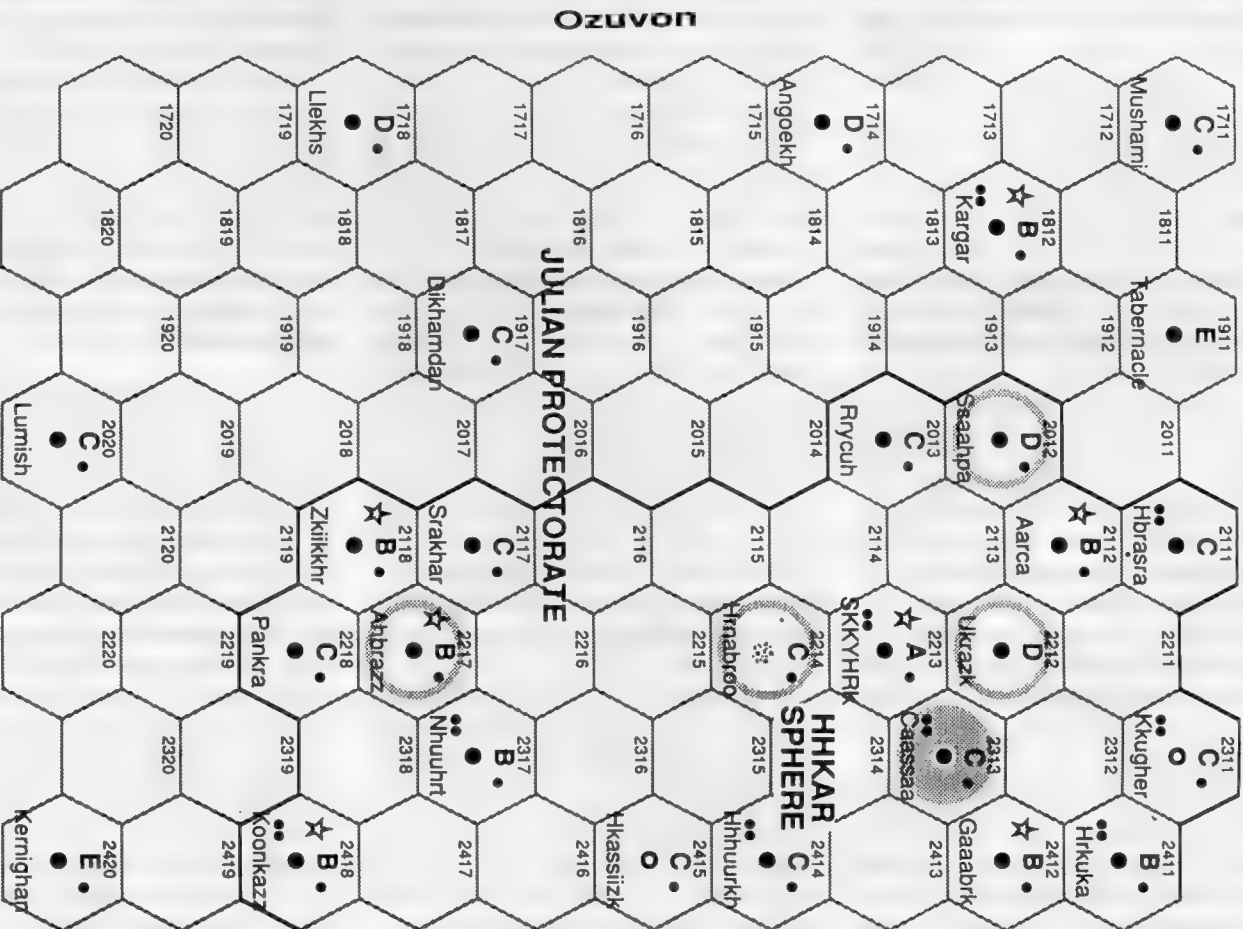
The Hhkar absolutely forbid contact between the Droyne on Ahbrazz and outsiders. Although the two have been at peace for over a century, hostility has not faded.

Name	Location	Stats	Bases	Classes	Zn	Data	AI	Stellar Data
Mushami	1711	C573683-7	Ni		424	J-	F5 D M6 D	
Angoekh	1714	D431888-6	Na Po		504	J-	F5 VI M3 D	
Liekhs	1718	D679310-4	Lo Ni		524	J-	F4 V	
Kargar	1812	B342642-9	F Ni Po		904	J-	F8 V	
Tabernacle	1911	E557A8DB-5	Wa		300	J-	F2 V M9 D	
Dikhamdan	1917	C546622-3	Ag Ni		722	J-	F9 D	
Ssaahpa	2012	D65A6JC-7	Ni Wa	A	103	Jh	F3 D	
Ryguh	2013	CADABJ8-8	FI NI Wa		103	Jh	G8 V	
Lumish	2020	C7B7624-6	FI NI		302	J-	M8 V	
Hbrasra	2111	C4535N7-8	M NI Po		200	Jh	F5 D M7 D	
Aarca	2112	B4768L5-6	J		401	Jh	G5 D	
Strakhar	2117	C4645H4-9	Ag Ni		302	Jh	G5 V	
Zkilkhr	2118	B6974N5-7	Ni		213	Jh	K6 V M3 D	
Ukrzak	2212	D57A4M7-7	Ni Wa	A	310	Jh	F8 V M3 D	
Skyhrk	2213	A975AHA-D	Hi In Cp		135	Jh	F8 V M4D M3D	
Hmrabroo	2214	C0005M7-9	As Ni	A	533	Jh	M6 VI	
Ahbrazz	2217	B2675N9-B	Ag Ni D3	A	403	Jh	F1 D	
Pankra	2218	C4477H6-7	Ag		102	Jh	F9 D	
Kkugher	2311	C3006H9-9	Na Ni Va		303	Jh	V M3 D	
Caassaa	2313	C5326JA-7	M Na Ni Po	R	805	Jh	M6 VI M8 D	
Nhuuhrt	2317	B8A44N9-7	FI NI		903	Jh	F5 V M9 D	
Hhkuka	2411	B8573K6-7	Lo Ni O2313		904	Jh	F7 D	
Gaaabr	2412	B86A4L5-8	Ni Wa		424	Jh	K9 V M5 D	
Hhhuurkh	2414	C58A5J5-8	Ni Wa		222	Jh	F3 VI	
Hkassizk	2415	C5208H7-8	De Na Po		704	Jh	F8 V	
Koonkazz	2418	B6518L8-5	Po		523	Jh	F7 VI	
Kernighan	2420	E58A666-7	Ni Ri Wa		904	J-	F9 D M7 D	

Hikaru subsector contains 27 worlds with a total population of 12.46 billion. The highest population is 10 billion at Skkyhrk; the highest tech level is D at Skkyhrk. The data column lists the population multiple, the number of planetoid belts and the number of gas giants.

Key: Cp: Subsector capital O: owner: (hex number of owner) Dn: Droyne population (where nx10 is the percent of the total population).

Bauk's Reach



Ozuuvon

JULIAN PROTECTORATE

Urru

HIKARU SUBSECTOR

reoccupy them when conditions changed. These edifices were treated with reverence in Hhkar culture.

As the Hhkar population increased, war grew more common, with different *ssaaahk* often competing for the same land. To reduce conflict, the system of dominant and subordinate *ssaaahk* was formed.

Technology advanced slowly but steadily over the millennia. Scouts explored their planet, then other planets and eventually other star systems (without jump drive).

The Hhkar abandoned their homeworld about -50,000. Scholars have long debated the reason why Ssrar was abandoned. The few Hhkar accounts humans have been privileged to see do not explain why. Nor do the writings hold open the possibility that they might one day return. The most widely accepted hypothesis notes that the Hhkar do not have a developed terraforming technology. Hhkar industrialization may have set in motion a runaway environmental metamorphosis, ultimately making the planet as uninhabitable as Venus in the Sol system. But this theory does not explain Hhkar secrecy about the event.

Another mystery is the Hhkar abandonment of Skkyhrk (Amdukan 2213), named Urinir during the First Imperium. The present inhabitants claim they are not descended from the occupants who left Skkyhrk and its neighboring worlds some 10,000 years ago. And they will not suggest a reason why those Hhkar migrated or where they might have gone. That the Hhkar left Skkyhrk, which was a stable and habitable world to them, weakens the hypothesis that Ssrar became uninhabitable.

When Hhkar returned to Skkyhrk in -222, they planned to dispassionately exterminate the entire population of over 10 million. Vargr emissaries negotiated a marginally better fate (complete surrender) with great difficulty. After the surrender, the Hhkar killed only those inhabitants who were not productive members of the society. This included the elderly, disabled and unemployed. All the rest were technically enslaved. No additional births were allowed, so the present population would be the last generation. Nonetheless, a small population of Vargr still survives in subterranean tunnels.

With the conquest of Skkyhrk, the Hhkar captured jump technology as well and began a program of expansion. Their technology level advanced also—drawing on knowledge from when their technology was much higher still—rising from TL10 to TL12 by the late 300s.

The Hhkar expanded their sphere steadily, replacing conquered world populations with their own. This effectively ended in 377 after the Battle of Kargar. In that battle, Hhkar war fleets engaged and with great difficulty defeated a small fleet of the Julian Star Legion

protecting the Kargar system (Amdukan 1812). Impressed by the cleverness and tenacity of the Julians in that first encounter, the Hhkar gave the commander, David Lindquist, an execution of honor and withdrew from the system. Despite sporadic skirmishes, the Hhkar grew more cooperative with the Julians after that, particularly with the Julian megacorporation Menderes. Today, Hhkar operate numerous industrial plants on Skkyhrk constructed by the Menderes Corporation.

TECHNOLOGY

Xenologists estimate the Hhkar current tech as TL13. The technology profile of Skkyhrk is D6-EDBAA-CCCD-FF-G (see *World Builder's Handbook*).

The exotic environment of the Hhkar homeworld, as well as their magnetic sense, directed Hhkar advancement along unexpected paths, leading to engineering techniques unfamiliar in the Imperium.

The Hhkar discovered metallurgy and electricity early and quickly became masters of magnetics. Instead of rollers, gears and ball bearings, they use magnetism to guide and drive mechanical action. Their urban vehicles generally employ magnetic levitation. They even use magnetism in their decor, although this is invisible to humans.

Magnetism also opened a way to the stars. Before finally acquiring jump drive from the Vargr, the Hhkar used ramscoops to hurl their ships at speeds near that of light. A ramscoop is essentially an enormous fusion-powered rocket, its nuclear reaction contained by a magnetic bottle. Instead of voluminous on-board tanks, however, it fuels itself by sweeping hydrogen from interstellar space with a colossal magnetic field.

The products Hhkar make are astonishingly durable, nearly unbreakable and virtually impossible to wear out, with few individual components. Humans and Vargr seldom find these products suitable for their purposes since they tend to be incompatible with usual operations, being overly heavy and "strange." The Menderes Corporation contracts with the Hhkar to make products and components following specifications more attractive to markets in the Julian Protectorate. Items most commonly produced depend on magnetism for operation, and are known for being well developed and effective. Hhkar gauss weapons are in particularly high demand.

Menderes owns a full quarter of all the manufacturing on Skkyhrk.

REFEREEING THE HHKAR

Hhkar characters are generated much the same as human characters. Strength and Endurance are rolled 2D+3. All other characteristics remain 2D. Later modifica-

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tions may not increase Strength higher than 18 (J).

Social Standing actually reflects the status of the *ssaaahk*. Hhkar with Social Standing 11+ come from a major *ssaaahk*. Social Standing 7-10 indicates one of the lesser *ssaaahk*. Social standing of 6— means the Hhkar is from among the *raaabr* and possesses an individual Social Standing. Interpret this after applying all modifications from the generation process.

Aging effects still apply to Hhkar. When Hhkar change gender, they lose all positive modifications to Strength, Dexterity, Endurance and Intelligence as a result of the generation process. Education effects are unaltered, although all skills go to 0. Renewed males tend to learn again those skills for which they have a skill 0. It's recommended that referees only allow first-cycle males as player characters.

Career: Hhkar will seldom be in Imperial service. Those few that are will only be found in the Domain of Antares, mainly in the Scout Service.

Most Hhkar that PCs will encounter will instead be associated with the Julian Protectorate at large. As such, virtually all careers will be open to them. They will favor the navy, marines, army, belter, and merchant professions. Several Hhkar may also be found among pirates or hunters, nobles or diplomats. Doctors will specialize in Hhkar medicine.

Careers from within the Hhkar Sphere are not presented here.

Skills: Hhkar from the sphere generally have little experience with outside technology. In trying to operate human or Vargr hardware or employ technical skill on such, Hhkar have a penalty to task rolls to be determined by the referee. If their careers were with the Julian military, they have no penalty.

Gravitics skill is rare among Hhkar within the sphere. Replace Gravitics with Magnetism, and Gravitic Vehicle with Magnetic Vehicle.

Hhkar cannot receive Carousing skill. Replace that with Tolerance skill. A Hhkar must have at least Tolerance-2 before he will join a crew with no other Hhkar members.

Hhkar with whip-like tails have more of an affinity for aquatic environments. They automatically have a minimum of Swimming-1 in campaigns that employ this skill.

Appearance: Considerable diversity ex-

ists among Hhkar, although individuals appear rather alike within *ssaaahk*. "Noble" Hhkar will have the features associated with one of the major *ssaaahk*. Others may be created, guided by the tables below.

SKIN COLOR (3D6)

Roll	Result
3-13	Olive
14	Dark olive
15	Brown
16	Maroon
17	Light brown
18	Gray

MARKINGS (2D6)

Roll	Result
2-7	None
8	Mottling
9	Flecks
10	Striping
11	Two-tone
12	Special

FEATURES (2D6)

Roll	Result
2-7	None
8	Small spinal ridge
9	Large spinal ridge
10	Small horn
11	Armor plates
12	Other

TAIL (1D6)

Roll	Result
1-4	Whip-like
5-6	Club-like

SPECIAL FEATURE (1D6)

Roll	Result
1-4	None
5-6	Special (e.g., long snout, double ridge, webbed digits, wrinkled flesh)

Combat: In weaponless combat, Hhkar have a variety of natural weapons. All may employ either teeth or claws. Those with club-like tails may use them as clubs. Only one weapon may be employed in a given combat round. Brawling skill applies as a DM.

Equipment: The size of the Hhkar should be remembered when selecting gear. Many items that smaller beings use are too small for a Hhkar. Trigger guards, for instance, will cause problems for their larger fingers and semi-retractable claws.

Hardware specifically designed for Hhkar can be ordered through the Menderes Corporation, whose area of operation includes Antares sector and all of Vargr space trailing of Corridor. Components adhere to Julian standards, so servicing and replacing expendables such as ammunition should not be overly difficult.

PLAYING THE HHKAR

Few sophont species can stand isolation from their race for long periods of time, even with alien companionship. Male Hhkar, however, can tolerate it well. From lesser *ssaaahk*, thousands of males leave the Hhkar Sphere to "scout," some in small groups, some alone. They may pursue full careers before finally returning to their homeworlds to share their experiences at communal hearing halls. Others may roam space for reasons related to religion or official business such as trade.

Hhkar will generally regard all non-Hhkar (*hkharkh*) as beneath any effort of respect, or disrespect for that matter. This especially applies to Hhkar from major *ssaaahk*. These usually use lesser *ssaaahk* to mediate with non-Hhkar for them. Hhkar with Tolerance skill might feign politeness at times, especially in military situations. Otherwise, they will merely treat non-Hhkars as useful or potentially useful creatures, and nothing more.

Individual non-Hhkar can earn status, and maybe even respect, by demonstrating exceptional performance at something important to the Hhkar. This respect is hard to come by, although military decorations and rank will bias the Hhkars' view.

A character who falls short of Hhkar ex-

pectations will usually find himself the subject of insults and harsh criticism. The same applies to worthy enemies. But the Hhkar will never insult an individual who has no status—to do so lowers the Hhkar to the other's level. A Hhkar will never admit to being wrong to a creature (either Hhkar or non-Hhkar) without status.

WORLDS GENERATION

Hhkar favor worlds whose atmospheres are at least tainted with sulfur compounds. Higher concentrations that would rate the atmosphere as exotic, corrosive, or even insidious are even better. To determine if an atmosphere has sulfur compounds, consult the *World Builder's Handbook*.

Because of the parallels between the Hhkar and Aslan government, star charts frequently employ government codes developed for the Aslan instead of more conventional codes:

G. Small Station or Facility: Either operated by an off-world *ssaaahk* or controlled by a company; population must be 3—.

H. Split Control: Different parts of the world are owned by several on-world *ssaaahk*, an analogy to human Balkanized worlds.

J. Single On-World Ssaaahk Control: Other small *ssaaahk* may be present, but they will be dominated by the stronger *ssaaahk*.

K. Single Multiworld Ssaaahk Control: The world is controlled by a single *ssaaahk* whose span extends over several worlds, not necessarily adjacent.

L. Major Ssaaahk Control: The world is controlled by a member of the Patriarchy.

M. Subordinate Ssaaahk Control: The world is controlled (but not owned) by a subordinate *ssaaahk* answerable to a member of the Patriarchy.

Orbiting cities and space habitats are common in Hhkar space. When using *World Builder's Handbook* to determine their presence, disregard concerns about the atmosphere and presence of native life. If the world has a tech level of 9+, roll 2D—2. If this roll is less than or equal to the world's population digit, then the tech level minus 6 of the population is in permanent orbit.

Base Codes: The Hhkar do not use Aslan base codes since the Patriarchy controls all Hhkar naval forces. A Hhkar naval base is represented by a J, a military base by an M, and both by an F.

Other characteristics of the world and system may be generated normally. Ω

The Hhkar originally appeared in articles by Eddie A. Echon published in Between Worlds 5 & 6.

This article was written with the kind assistance of members of the History of the Imperium Working Group (HIWG).

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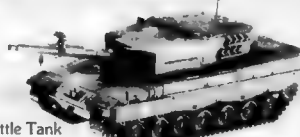
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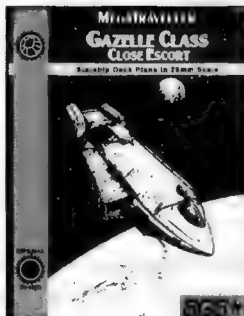


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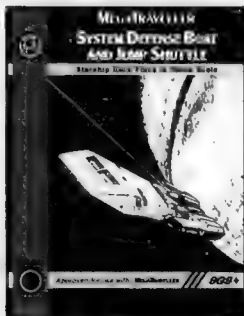
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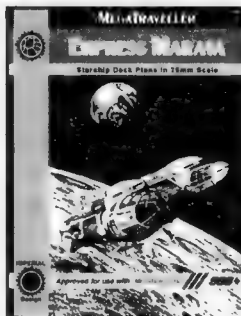
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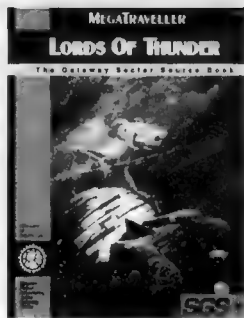
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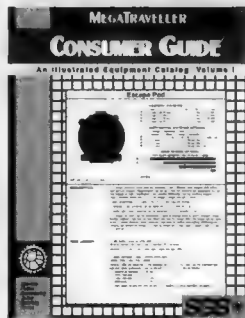
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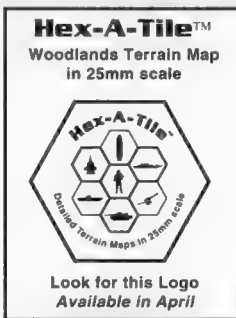
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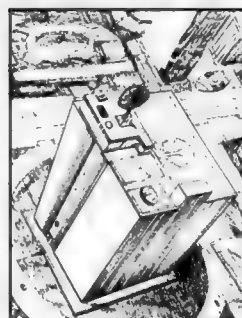
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TRAVELLER *News Service*

Sharim/Gushemege

Date: 281-1121

¶An explosion of undetermined origin destroyed the jump-6, *Fast Fleet*-class courier *Metternich* today, just two minutes after it cleared Sharim Downport's airspace. All hands were lost.

¶Observers and sensor operators at Sharim Downport report that the explosion originated in the forward area near the bridge. The *Fast Fleet*-class courier is not equipped to carry explosive or inflammable substances in this area. Local experts are therefore expressing some concern that the explosion may have been the result of sabotage.

¶The *Metternich* was under special registry to the Imperial Regency of Intelligence and Security and was heading rimward after completing a mission within the borders of Strephon's Imperium. The nature of the mission has not been disclosed. However, local officials speaking under guarantees of anonymity revealed that Senior Regent Irena Thorfel had arrived on planet with the ship and may have been on board at the time of the explosion.

¶Despite bitter feelings toward the regency, local spokespersons for Lucan's Imperium denied any involvement, as did representatives for Dulinor and Strephon. There has been no comment from the sizable minority that supports the Ziru Sirkaa.

Zeda/Dagudashag

Date: 295-1121

¶Forces from Lucan's Imperium have gained absolute control of this high-population world after three days of fierce planetside and orbital fighting.

¶The naval and ground forces of Strephon's Imperium were overwhelmed by the size of this assault, which seems to be the leading edge of a major offensive.

¶Expert observers estimate that Strephon's forces suffered heavy losses during the fighting, including two BatRons, at least four CruRons, and an unspecified number of carriers and escorts. Lucan's losses are unknown but are believed to be considerably lighter.

¶The only announcement made thus far by the Lucan's occupying forces assured the general population that their "liberation from the pretender Strephon's yoke" is permanent and that a "great number" of assets are committed to ending the existence of his "illegitimate Imperium" in the adjoining Gushemege sector.

¶Spokesmen for Strephon's faction planned an underground press conference in response, but never arrived at the designated site. No explanations were received.

Anaxias/Delphi

Date: 301-1121

¶Associate Operating Officer Haling Pracapas, spokesperson for Tukera Lines, announced today that the megacorporation had recently completed negotiations with the Nermis and Dreed'n systems (2421 & 2322 Silver Laurel/Hinterworlds) regarding the construction, maintenance and protection of a deep-space refueling site at sector parsec coordinate 2321.

¶This development is an important step toward realizing the benefits of the trade agreement finalized between Margaret's domain and the Hiver Federation on 187-1121.

¶With the addition of this deep-space refueling site, jump-2 convoys can move across the Hinterworlds sector between Spica and Delphi without passing through the regions occupied by the Nullian League.

¶When asked if this ambitious construction project had been motivated by a desire to sidestep league systems, Pracapas responded, "Analyses showed that it was more economical to build a deep-space refueling site. The league charges very high trade tariffs and fees. There is no hidden political agenda in our decision; this is strictly business."

¶Astute observers of regional politics point out that Dreed'n's contributions to the deep-space site can hardly be construction-related. A central operating area for a number of associated starmerc firms, Dreed'n's inclusion in the deal ensures Tukera a strong military presence proximal to this potentially vulnerable transport link.

Shakhamash/Gushemege

Date: 319-1121

¶After two weeks of constant and bitter fighting, Lucan's naval elements have driven off the Strephonist defenders of this system.

¶Losses on both sides were heavy, although experts agree with the assessment of Lucan's Admiral Rapida Amani that the Battle of Shakhamash represents a "crippling blow" to Strephon's Imperium.

¶From the beginning, Lucan's 17 numbered, colonial and reserve fleets enjoyed an immense numerical advantage. Local Strephonist commanders had assumed that Lucan's forces in the Dagudashag Salient represented his entire invasion force. Consequently, the massive attack upon Shakhamash came as a complete surprise.

¶Lucan's commitment of an additional 17 fleets makes this the largest campaign to be launched in two years. It also indicates that most military analysts throughout the Imperium grossly underestimated the number of fleet assets that Capitol was willing to risk in a campaign against Strephon's Imperium.

¶Official spokespersons within Lucan's naval command have revealed that the offensive will carry forward into the very heart of Strephon's Imperium and will not stop until the "pretender" has been killed or captured.

Amdani/Daibei

Date: 332-1121

¶In an ill-timed blow to the fortunes of Strephon's war-wracked Imperium, the Imperial Regency of Intelligence and Security announced today that Strephon's claim to the Iridium Throne has been officially disallowed and, therefore, formally declared void.

¶Regents from IRIS were compelled to eliminate the individual who claims himself to be the "real" Strephon when they were denied permission to conduct a number of routine tests. These tests are required of all would-be successors in order to determine the validity of their claims. The tests are designed to discover if the test subject is either a robot or a cloned entity.

¶This news was delivered by Senior Regent Irena Thorfel, who had been presumed lost in the tragic (and still unexplained) *Metternich* explosion which occurred just outside Sharim (Gushemege sector) Downport airspace several months ago.

¶Thorfel refused to explain how she survived this disaster which, according to official reports, claimed the lives of all hands and passengers aboard the *Metternich*.

¶However, she did make a number of pointed remarks suggesting Ziru Sirkaan involvement in the incident. "I am sure that various individuals on Vland are now happy that the *Metternich* incident didn't prevent me from delivering my findings. With the supposed-Strephon's claim now formally disallowed, a number of powerful Vilani commercial entities will find their own interests easier to pursue. It's a pity—and quite ironic—they felt it necessary to ensure this favorable result by attempts at sabotage."

Nullia/Hinterworlds

Date: 346-1121

¶Drastur Kelbis, head consul of the Nullian League's Senior Committee, made a public address today, warning that various commercial interests in the Hinterworlds sector were unhappy with Margaret's new Hiver trade agreement.

¶Citing the recently announced "Deep-Space Site 2321" initiative (also being referred to as the Nermis Deal), Kelbis accused Margaret's domain of "purposefully and maliciously undercutting the commercial livelihood of the league and other mercantile entities" within the Hinters.

¶He also pointed out that Tukera Lines has been busy negotiating preferred port rights along the jump-1 route leading from Perseus to Pusan (2222 to 2129, Silver Laurel/Hinters) over the past 90 days.

¶TNS reporters have been unable to find any statements of disapproval regarding these trade agreements, other than those issued by the league itself.

¶When asked to specify which other "commercial interests" in the Hinters had voiced disapproval of these new mercantile developments, Kelbis dismissed the question as being "both snide and specious."

¶Kelbis also warned that the Hivers, Margaret and "her lackeys" (referring to husband Blaine Tukera, private owner of Tukera), would be wise to realize that such overt economic maneuverings could easily be seen as the opening of a trade war. Kelbis urged an increased use of economic negotiations and restraint, before "the situation progresses to open conflict."

Atudew/Corridor (2810 C595000-8)

Date: 326-1121

¶The independent seeker *KeLlananae Tourz Agud* was disabled by planetary defenses during its final approach to Atudew yesterday after traffic control reported it as an "unidentified vessel of Vargr origin."

¶Automated defenses rated the seeker hostile and fired upon it before the system defense boat *Gaa Khiu* was able to respond and make a positive identification.

¶The *KeLlananae Tourz Agud* was identified as the former *Jewel of Corridor*, an independent prospecting vessel operated by Gordon Irakakigka, a human of mixed-Vilani descent. There were no casualties reported in the incident, but port authority officials described Irakakigka's reaction to the incident as "impassioned." The *KeLlananae Tourz Agud* underwent minor repairs and continued on its way.

Phaln/Gushemege

Date: 352-1121

¶After almost a month of intense fighting, local units of Strephon's Imperium surrendered to Lucan's forces here on Phaln.

¶There was little joy among Lucan's command staff, who have lost over 350,000 men in the fighting.

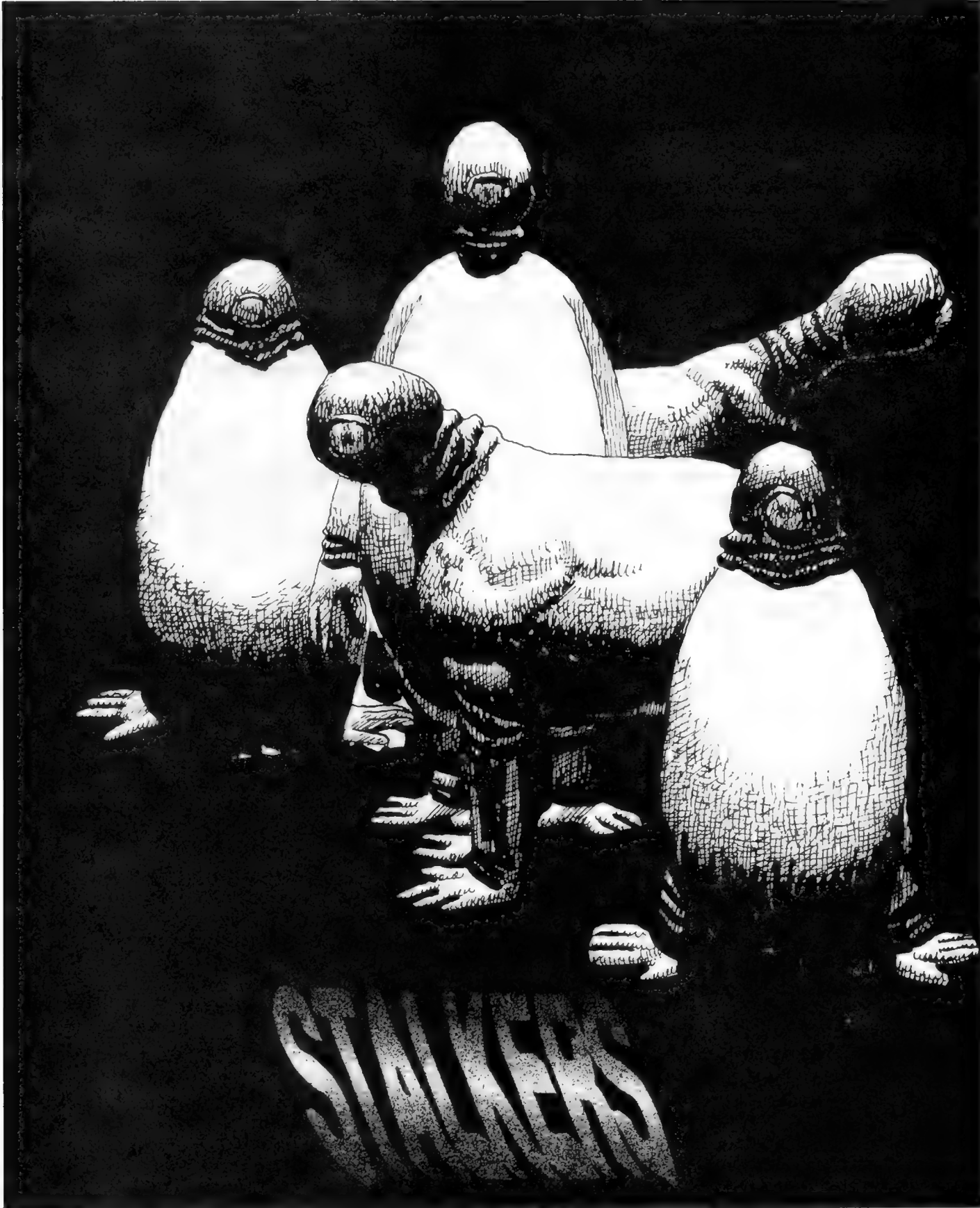
¶Although the Strephonists fared little better, their stiff resistance has blunted the two-pronged Gushemege campaign, which Lucan's general staff has dubbed the "Extermination Offensive" (referring to its intended objective of eliminating Strephon's Imperium).

¶Naval spokespersons refused to comment on rumors that the offensive has so battered the nearby systems that it has become impossible to repair even minor battle damage due to the destruction of suitable starport facilities.

¶There are also unconfirmed rumors of disproportionate losses in TankRon assets.

¶These various factors suggest that the recent decline in the pace of the Extermination Offensive may in fact portend a complete standstill.

¶If this were to be the case, it is unknown how long Lucan's forces could remain on site, given their already overextended logistical situation. Ω



By Charles E. Gannon

Stalkers are a minor race maintaining a xenophobic state at the heart of the Hinterworlds sector. While humans call the species "Stalkers" in reference to their two-meter necks, their common name is "Outcasts of the Whispering Sky," and the scientific name translates as "Makers of Brightestness" (or, in human terms, "intelligent communicators").



occupying only 10 systems, Stalkers total (it is thought) less than 500 million.

A Stalker is quadrupedal, with the brain located in a heavy bone casing ("skull") at the top of the Stalker's "chest." Stalker skin is smooth and must be kept somewhat moist (two baths a day are a minimum, and various emollients help keep it moist). The neck is actually boneless, comprised of tough muscle, sinew and a telescoping cartilage arrangement that allows it to shorten to one-half meter and curl up like a snake.

The limbs are strong and appear rubbery and almost clownlike when relaxed. However, the tissue that surrounds the Stalker's "hands" (three fingers, one thumb) is a strange compromise between muscle and erectile tissue. The Stalker is able to "retract" the skin of one or more digits toward its wrist, leaving the digits much thinner and more nimble than a human's. Or the Stalker may completely relax the tissue around the digit, which produces a chubby but very sturdy extremity that provides a lot of stability and ground contact. The Stalker is much faster than it looks (80% human speed) and is incredibly steady on its "feet." In order to use both its front feet as hands, the Stalker puffs up its rear feet, tucks these underneath its large torso and rocks backward into a stationary, tilted position.

The Stalker's food (and backup air) intake is located at the front of its torso. A number of serrated grinding ridges are found within, rather than teeth.

Vision: Perhaps the most interesting Stalker feature is the compound eye, which has a rugged tripartite lid. The Stalker eye is extremely complex, with multiple retinæ and hexagonal lenses.

Stalkers create light patterns by secreting a fluid on the retina that becomes bioluminescent when electrochemically charged by neural impulse. Although this sounds complex to humans, it is no more involved or complicated than the audible tone and pitch variations that humans create almost unthinkingly. If a Stalker does not "charge" this secretion, the fluid's extreme sensitivity to electromagnetic emissions serves to enhance the eye's sensitivity to the infrared and ultraviolet ends of the spectrum.

Any given cone in the eye can be used either for vision (light intake) or communication (light output). Stalkers communicate through light patterns emanated by their eyecones—they can vary the pattern, colors and durations of light emissions. These gradations of hue and intensities can be very subtle, approximating an audible murmur.

Hearing: A Stalker's hearing is somewhat poorer than a human's since the all-important and highly developed visual organ satisfied most of the creature's needs during its evolution. This creates an unusual psychological environment—it gets all its valuable input through a single source, which can make the world seem a little cluttered and overcrowded at times.

Since its communication is entirely visual in nature, the Stalker has a predisposition to try to find meaning in that which it sees, particularly that which evinces any discernible pattern. But most environments offer far more visual stimulation variety than they do audible stimulation variety. As such, the Stalker has had to adapt to living in a "noisier" environment than humans. To adapt to this situation, the Stalkers create very orderly visual environments—their dwellings and communities are simultaneously austere and elegant, emphasizing simple, graceful lines. The human saying "everything in its place, and a place for everything" characterizes their society (and some Stalkers have wondered how such a sane observation could possibly arise from so chaotic a species as humanity).

INTERACTION WITH HUMANS

Communication with humans (and most other species) is achieved via a "light translator," which the human focuses on a Stalker's eyecones. The variations are interpreted and represented as speech. Most Stalkers

use the complementary audio translator, which converts human vocalizations into light patterns displayed on a flip-down cuprothallium plate. Most such units are equipped with a directional microphone to eliminate other noise from being picked up.

Because of the way their vision and hearing have developed, Stalkers find humans almost maddeningly chaotic. Entry into a human environment bombards Stalkers with all sorts of unclear, abrupt visual stimuli—some of which may be critically important, others of which may be irrelevant or even purposely misleading (such as advanced holograms, which create near-perfect optical illusions)!

Almost as bad, the normal quiet of the Stalker environment suddenly is swept away by the constant yakyakyak of human speech, mechanical alarms and decorative tones. The average Stalker is repelled and confused by this hyperactive and illogical babble.

SOCIETY

Because they communicate through light patterns, when a Stalker looks at stars twinkling in the night sky, he "hears" an almost audible murmur. It seems that all of existence is whispering, but in a language Stalkers don't understand. For this reason, their common (nonscientific) name for themselves is "Outcasts of the Whispering Sky." This self-perception as a race selected to be outcasts from universal knowledge and communication deepens their tendency toward dour xenophobia.

Stalker society is built around "great watchers," who are essentially wise and accomplished male elders. Heritage and inheritance are traced matrilineally, which provides the culture with an unusual degree of gender-balanced power sharing.

Stalker young are kept sheltered until sexually mature, and parents are belligerent and tireless defenders/chaperones/overseers. The young expect and are reassured by this, however, and Stalkers are very clannish and dependent upon contact with their own kind, even as fully mature adults.

Stalker "wanderers" occupy an interesting (if occasionally ambiguous) place in society, somewhat akin to the "contrary-man" of the Dakota Sioux. The average Stalker considers a wanderer to be somewhat mad, since this individual is willing to spend time among strange, chaotic species and forego the reassuring contact of other Stalkers. However, returning wanderers are instant celebrities, since it is primarily through such individuals that the Stalker populace learns more about the worlds and species beyond their small sphere of control. The wanderer is therefore a simultaneous sage/madman in the eyes of other Stalkers, and his social status varies with the environment and circumstances in which he meets other Stalkers.

HISTORY

The inherent conservatism of Stalkers is not just a product of their sensory physiology, but their overall evolution. The Stalker is descended from carnivore stock, but is nearly unique among intelligent species in that its particular descent is from the "siren" subcategory. The early Stalker dwelled in shallow lakes, ponds, swamps and marshes. There, with its cumbersome trunk resting on the bottom, the Stalker would attract surface creatures by playing brief flitters of light across its eyecones—looking like the reflection of a smaller creature just below the surface. If the surface creature moved closer to investigate, the Stalker would abruptly extend its neck and seize the prey in its mandibles, then drag the creature

MEGATRAVELLER™

underwater until it drowned. Waiting just under the water (with occasional breathing through the audiorespirator ducts on the head) also allowed the Stalker to avoid the surface creatures that otherwise would prey upon it. Consequently, a conservative "hiding/lurking" psychology became part of its evolutionary legacy.

That legacy turned toward actual intelligence when the Stalker homeworld began drying up. As water levels dropped, some Stalkers learned to work together to dig deeper marsh bottoms, locate spring sources and excavate them into lasting ponds—which became the first centers of Stalker society.

As these social areas became overcrowded, internal bickering over limited survival resources grew. The onset of warfare spurred the full realization of tool use and the dawn of true Stalker intelligence.

CHARACTER GENERATION

Stalker NPCs can be generated using standard **MegaTraveller** generation tables. However, Stalkers receive a +1 on their Dexterity roll and a -1 on their Endurance roll. They average 200 kilograms. Stalkers have problems interacting with most other species, so all interpersonal tasks or reactions to other species receive an automatic DM of -2 (-1 for Hivers). The louder, more boisterous Vargr types will incur a -3.

IDEAS FOR PLAY

Since Stalkers tend to remain in a fairly small astrographic region, their degree of participation in a campaign depends upon its location. If it is set in an area within or proximal to the Hinterlands, Stalker NPCs can be integrated in any number of ways—especially as traders, diplomats, or wanderers. If the campaign is set some distance away from the Hinters, the only reasonable opportunity for contact with a Stalker is if the NPC is a wanderer.

The following adventures ideas can be expanded into full-blown adventures or incorporated as items of local color.

Wanderer

The PCs encounter a Stalker which is missing its eye due to some old injury. This renders the being—ironically named Shines-Brightly—as a deaf-mute among its own kind. Although many Stalkers suffering such a loss would commit suicide, Shines is determined to go on by learning to live in a primarily audial world.

Through customized human surgery, this Stalker is now able to hear in normal human ranges and has been rigged with a vocoder, enabling easy discussion with any species that use audio as their primary means of communication.

Shines is a wanderer now, an easy task for him since he is no longer visually bewildered by the chaotic environments of most other cultures. He is quite gregarious and is normally guided around by a small seeing-eye robot.

When the PCs encounter Shines, he is in a starport extralidity zone, casting about with his arms, making cries of distress: Some young hoodlums deactivated his robot and stole it. Most other individuals in the starport are giving the strange, scarred, frantic Stalker a *very* wide berth. However, if the PCs take an interest in Shines and his problem, he will become a loyal friend and ally.

While his primary skills now lie in the areas of Liaison and Journalism, Shines can offer the PCs one uncommon benefit—the ability to secure them access to the Leenitakot ringword (an Ancient artifact) within the Outcast sphere of control.

Only four other missions have ever been allowed in for research/investigation by the xenophobic Stalkers. This could represent a major cultural and (via sales of sensor recordings) financial gain for the PCs.

Homeworld


The PCs are asked (by human authorities) to journey to the Stalker homeworld to pick up a trader who has overstayed his welcome and is now in Stalker custody. Upon arriving at system 214-389 (1328 Bruia/Hinters), the PCs get to experience the strange environment of the Stalkers, who insist on maintaining the planet in its primordial state. Technology is kept to a bare minimum. Industrial development and construction are reserved for other worlds (once again reflecting the Stalker emphasis on that which is native to them and their comparative disregard for that which is foreign).

The PCs will find that the Balkanization of the world (along family lines) has created a problem—although one family holds the trader in custody, a rival family claims that *it* was the first to order him detained and thus has the right to oversee any extradition proceedings. The PCs will have to navigate a maze of alien family politics to get the trader released alive. And they'd better hurry, because Stalker tempers are growing short.

Cargo

The PCs encounter a Stalker merchant on the Nullian League world of Rouen (1925 Silver Laurel/Hinters). The Stalker has a problem—his ship has been impounded by league authorities, who are cracking down on all Stalker traffic that passes through their ports. It seems that the league suspects the Stalkers of supplying the ongoing resistance forces among the human inhabitants of Angerhelm (1026 Bruia/Hinters), who are trying to repel an invasion by league forces.

While the matter of the ship impounding may be resolved in a matter of weeks, the cargo cannot wait—it is a large tank of bioluminescent worms (native to Caramond, 2731 Aquila/Hinters) which are now alive but will begin to die within 10 days if not taken to a proper facility. When "schooling," these worms emit a light pattern that Stalkers find immensely soothing. Will the PCs help the Stalker get his cargo into Stalker space? As humans, the league *will* permit them to make the run. Ω



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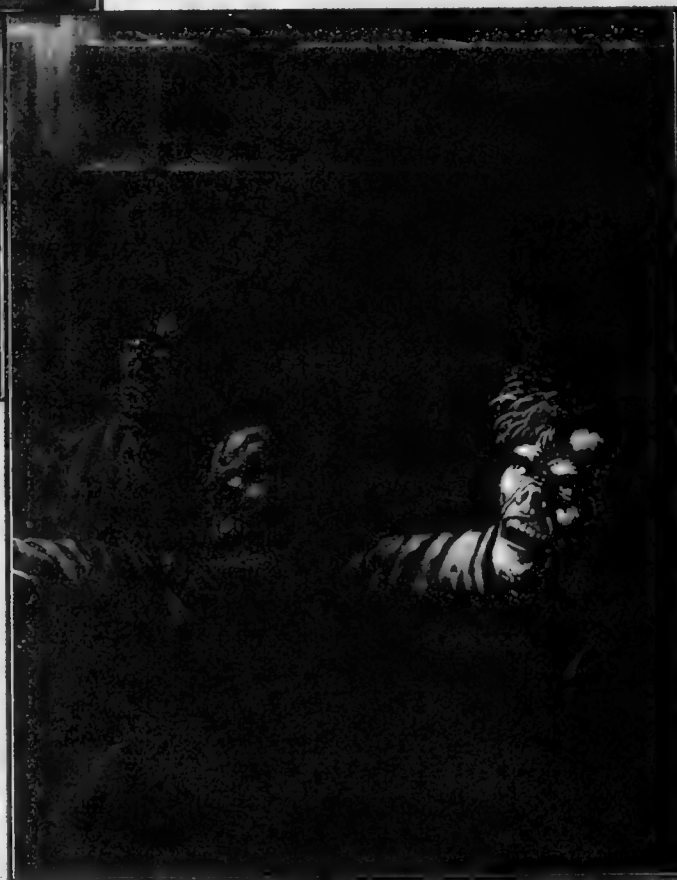
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WHILE WE'RE AT IT, LET'S GET THE GUYS' OPINION...



I'M SORRY THAT OUR HUNT CROSSED INTO YOUR CAMP. IT'S A STUPID SPORT, BUT SOMEBODY'S GOTTA DO IT.



DINOSAUR HUNTERS??

THAT EXPLAINS A BUNCH!

WHA THE?!

GLAD THEY PICKED US

LOOK, OUR WORD BALLOONS ARE ALL BUNCHED UP.

WOOF

?

EXCUSE ME, BUT MAY I ASK YOU WHAT YOU WERE GONNA DO ONCE YOU TRACKED THE BEAST DOWN. HMMM?



NORMALLY WE HUNT DOWN THE DINOSAUR AND THEN LURE THE CREATURE TO OUR BASE WHERE WE DISPOSE OF IT. IF WE, OF COURSE, MAKE IT BACK!



BOOM!



IS IT ALWAYS LIKE THIS?!



SAY NOW, SUPPOSE WE DON'T MAKE IT, THEN WHAT HAPPENS?



I'LL KILL IT WITH THIS!



WOOF!



HEY, THAT'LL DO IT!



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CHALLENGE

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HEART OF DARKNESS: Track a 1000-year-old wizard and his magical talisman. Can you destroy this ancient evil—or will you be consigned to an unimaginable fate? 64-page **Dark Conspiracy** trade paperback. GDW: 2103. \$10.

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ETHER SOCIETY NEWSLETTER: For those who believe in the **Space: 1889** steampunk genre. Members receive quarterly newsletter and membership sticker. Ether Society, PO Box 1636, Bloomington, IL 61702-1646.

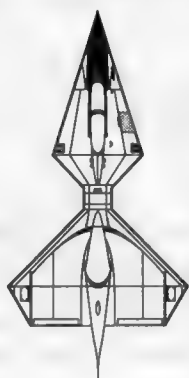
NEW FROM ICE THIS MONTH are *Classic Organizations* and *European Enemies (Hero)*, *Outlaw and Aliens & Artifacts (Rolemaster)*, *Silent Death Unleaded* and *Bladestorm Bestiary*.

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Things That Go Bump in the Night

By Lester W. Smith

One of the most important themes of **Dark Conspiracy** is that everything changes, continually. Consequently, players ought to find their characters facing new plots, new creatures, new challenges every time they play. It is in that spirit that we present to you the following trio of new beasts for use in your **Dark Conspiracy** adventures.



Deathmist

Appear: 1
Attack: 80%
Move: 5

Initiative: 3
Strength: —
Constitution: —

Agility: 4
Skill/Dam.: —/1D10
Hits: —

In appearance, deathmist looks much like any thick fog, but it is actually a semisentient, semicohesive creature. It is white in color, sometimes with streaks of sooty gray or dingy yellow swirling within, and it often has a slight odor of sulphur. Deathmist hangs easily upon the air, propelling itself by extending pseudopods and drawing its bulk slowly forward. A typical deathmist will easily fill an area eight to 10 meters in diameter.

Wind direction and speed strongly affect a deathmist's movement. For that reason, the creatures prefer to lurk in still air, such as inside buildings or in dead-end alleys. If they can get upwind of their prey, however, they can use the air currents to move more quickly than normal.

A deathmist attacks living creatures by entering their breathing passages, then solidifying to choke off their air supply. As the victims die, the deathmist feeds off their waning life force. (Treat the attack as strangling—page 79 of the **Dark Conspiracy** rules—except that armor has no effect.)

A deathmist cannot be harmed by normal weapons; they pass right through them. Heat can destroy deathmists, however. Normal sunlight burns one off within one minute, and a raging fire in half that time. Bonfires and torches can hold one at bay, and even a cigarette lighter or a match is sufficient to make a deathmist's Initiative rating drop by one point (extra lighters or matches do not cause any additional loss, however). The best defense against deathmist is generally to run away from it.

The creatures are native to a multitude of proto-dimensions, most of which they have scoured of all other life forms. Occasionally, they find their way through a dimensional portal into our world, where they enjoy a terrible, if brief (just until sunup) period of glutting their hunger.



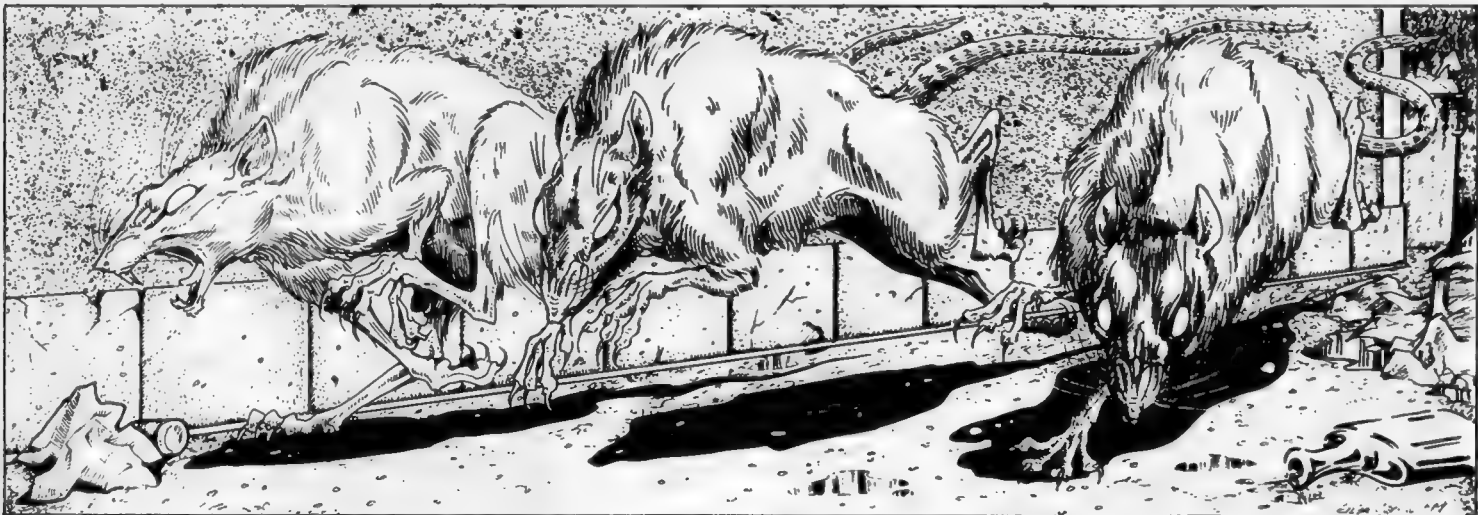
Needlebeaks

# Appear: 1D6	Initiative: 4	Agility: 6
Attack: 40%	Strength: 1	Skill/Dam.: 8/2D6*
Move: 15/30/60	Constitution: 2	Hits: 3/5

*Halved on any attacks not specifically versus the eyes.

One of the results of the Earth becoming a nastier place to live has been that many normal animal types have adapted to become more aggressive. Such is the case with what have commonly come to be called needlebeaks. Needlebeaks are apparently a new species of raven, one that is faster and more durable than normal, and which specifically targets the eyes of its victims.

Treat attacks by needlebeaks as aimed attacks against the head (a Difficult level task). If for some reason a needlebeak cannot attack the eyes (they are covered by goggles, for instance), it will still attempt to attack the head, but its damage rating is halved. Only if the target's entire head is covered will a needlebeak attack other hit locations. In such a case, it will generally give up and fly away instead.



Seekers

# Appear: 1D6+2	Initiative: 5	Agility: 8
Attack: 85%	Strength: 2	Skill/Dam.: 4/1D6
Move: 12/24/48	Constitution: 2	Hits: 3/6

Some of the Dark Races such as morlocks and dark elves have taken to breeding gigantic rats and training them to track prey in the same way as bloodhounds. Among the Dark Minion hunters who have encountered them, the common term for these rats is "seekers." Seekers are not only *much* larger than normal for rats (some mass as much as greyhounds), they are also much more intelligent. Fortunately, very few of them exist, and they do not seem to reproduce as quickly as normal rats. Otherwise, they might take over the world on their own. Ω

Episode Four: Tricolor Conspiracy

After a journey through unknown space, the mission team of Operation Back Door arrived in the home system of the Ylii. There they encountered a special envoy named Vishzuss'zruhna'zhii (nicknamed Vish), a Ylii who established communication with the group members and then escorted them to an important meeting with Ylii leaders.

The Ylii wanted to learn more about the humans and were also quite interested in allying with them against a mutual foe—the Kafers. The PCs were on their way home with this information when sabotage stranded them in deep space and their friend Vish was kidnapped.

AIA Deputy Director Larkin sent them to retrieve Vish and uncover the French supremacist plot that lies behind his disappearance. The characters have followed the trail to Earth, where they are to meet with Herman Unterer, an AIA informant.

VIVE LA FRANCE

Where: Lubeck, Germany, Earth.

What: The characters learn about Tricolor.

When the PCs arrive in Lubeck, they will have no problem locating Herman Unterer, who lives in a historic home two doors

*By Charles E.
Gannon*



OPERATION BACK DOOR

down from the former residence of Thomas Mann (now a national landmark). After hearing the PCs' tale of woe and asking a few questions about Larkin, Herman will recommend that the characters go the IEX campus in France and look for Dumaine in the Sapientology Complex. He may not be there, but any messages for him would be addressed to the campus and forwarded. Find the forwarding address, and you've probably found Dumaine. After all, he still has to maintain his position with the IEX, although he is working for, as Herman will put it, "those Parisian madmen." Questioned as to whom these madmen are, Herman will tell the characters what he knows of Tricolor—which is quite a bit, thanks to his sources in France. His comments can either be formulated by the referee, or the information in the sidebar on page 36 can be presented as a general synopsis.

Herman is unsure *why* Tricolor would want Vish. Clearly, something underhanded must be involved, but Herman has no information that would suggest what that might be. Getting that information, he concludes, is the characters' job, anyway.

However, he can provide them with one last piece of information—the pass-code for entry to the building belonging to the Sapientology Division (Dumaine's).

CAMPUS CRASHING IN CAMPAGNE

Where: IEX HQ, St. Denis de la Campagne, France, Earth.

What: Finding out where Dumaine has gone.

After the characters arrive in St. Denis de la Campagne, they should prepare for a brief nocturnal visit to the campus of L'Institut des Études Xénologiques (IEX). Observation of the site will show that its sprawling grounds are not very heavily or aggressively patrolled, but the individual buildings show signs of increased security measures.

Getting to the sapientology building under the cover of night should be an Easy task, and the pass-code will get the characters in without a hitch. However, it will be more difficult to dodge the internal walking patrols, particularly if the characters are using visible lights to inspect darkened offices, etc. If the characters have had the forethought to purchase active IR or light amplification goggles, they should find it relatively easy to avoid attracting the guards' attention.

A quick search of the confidential electronic mail system (accessible from the head secretary's terminal) will indicate that for the past four weeks, all of Dumaine's mail has been forwarded. However, there is a security restriction on where it is being forwarded to. Cracking the security restriction to discover the forwarding address is a computer-related task, which will be easier if the operator is cyberenhanced and can jack directly into the system.

Once access is obtained, the characters will discover that Dumaine's mail is being rerouted to an electronic mail account registered with Nanobiotech Associates, located on Mars in the new Rushtown community at the foot of Olympus Mons. Dumaine has recently received a large volume of mail from Sverker Olavson—a Swedish Nobel Prize winner. One of the PCs will recall that Olavson's most recent work involved research into achieving a finer understanding of Pentapod biogeneering, particularly in the area of recombinant genetics and viral vaccines.

A fair amount of correspondence from Mars has also been sent to Olavson, all bearing Dumaine's name.

Searches of Dumaine's office and the rest of the facilities will turn up nothing of interest, except for the fact that any other IEX database shows Dumaine as being on assignment somewhere in the American Arm. Dumaine's office is particularly sterile, as if someone took great pains to remove anything that might offer a clue to his location.

Once the characters have avoided the interior walking patrol, they will be able to slip away into the night and get off the IEX campus without a hitch. In the event that they are detected by a

guard, they will have to disable that guard in one turn. Otherwise, the guard will alert IEX's security forces. The response will be swift and home in on the location of the guard's communicator.

The next logical stop for the characters is Mars. They can start that journey by hopping on a shuttle and finding a flight departing for the L-5 in-system transit hub. There is no service available to Mars for the next 36 hours. However, given their credit line, the PCs will be able to charter a courier on short notice (although the price will be exorbitant).

BOOMTOWN RATS

Where: Boomtown, Olympus Mons, Mars.

What: Observing Dumaine and learning of his plot.

Arriving on Mars, the characters are treated to the dubious charm of the newest American resurgence there—a modular, pressurized urban sprawl named Boomtown. Located approximately 300 kilometers north of the older American colony, Boomtown is the direct outgrowth of the tantalum strike made in Olympus Mons several years ago. The chaotic cluster of buildings holds almost 10,000 inhabitants, most of whom are workers directly involved with the production of tantalum. The corporate execs are taking up residence in the old American colony domes, which are now coming out of mothballs at an impressive rate.

Dumaine's address at Nanobiotech Associates corresponds with the only "high-tech" industry in Boomtown. Nestled among a clutter of cheap modular housing, saloons and other less reputable establishments, it strikes a discordant note with its surroundings. Nanobiotech seems something of a mystery to the locals, which the PCs will learn from various barflies that haunt the taverns. In fact, as far as anyone can tell, the employees live in the complex. Only a couple of security guards ever come out for a drink—and then only on weekends.

A little research behind the corporate structure of Nanobiotech shows it to be a small private firm conducting peripheral research in support of IEX initiatives. Observing the installation will reveal subtle but potent automated security systems, along with 13 armed and armored guards (Experienced NPCs with rigid armor vests and SG-77 assault rifles). Access is restricted to authorized individuals—a clearance that is awarded neither frequently nor quickly.

If the PCs show a little knowledge of detective work, they will look for clues in the one interface the supposedly closed system still has with its environment—its waste. The trash coming out of Nanobiotech is mostly quite mundane, ranging from domestic consumables to broken lab beakers and half-eaten sandwiches. However, if the PCs inspect the contents of the surgical sharps containers, they will discover dozens of small ampules that have been used to hold Ylii blood samples (determinable only via microscope). A close inspection of the food will turn up evidence of some sort of Ylii protein compound, most of which is uneaten.

If the PCs decide to get an analysis of the Ylii blood from someone with a knowledge of hematology, they will only get one clear result—each separate blood sample seems to contain traces of a virus, but no two viruses are the same. And although the blood sample will baffle the analyst, he will feel that the viruses he's seeing are *not* friendly ones.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE REFEREE

The PCs have found where Vish and Dumaine have been stashed and have discovered what Tricolor is up to—creating a biogeneered sleeper virus lethal to Ylii. Of course, to conduct such research, Tricolor had to use one of its IEX agents to acquire at least

2300AD

one live subjects for biochemical tests (hence, Dumaine's objective throughout Operation Back Door and his abduction of Vish).

The ghastly strategy Tricolor has concocted—while morally repugnant—could prove to be equally effective. The virus would be used to infect the Ylii and their food supply. It would lay dormant while spreading throughout the species, and then—after a year or two—would erupt into a rapid and absolutely lethal terminal phase.

Tricolor

Tricolor evolved out of a rambling conversation held in a sidewalk cafe on the Champs Elysées late in 2287. As the lengthening shadow of the Arc de Triomphe advanced across their table, two senior French generals and two high-ranking government members resolved to stop bemoaning France's slip into somnolence and to do something about it. And thus Tricolor was born—a secret society of French men and women dedicated to restoring France to her former power and prestige.

This group quickly secured members who worked in key governmental services and bureaus (including DGSE), military Tribunals, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry of Industry. These ultranationalists laid the groundwork for the military coup of 2289 that overthrew the 12th Republic, an accomplishment that Tricolor thought would ensure France's rebirth as a true superpower. Fortunately, the French people reacted with dismay—and some ill-disguised disgust—to the bellicose drum-beating of the new military government which finally fell in 2294.

Tricolor maintained its secrecy throughout this period, riding out the sweeping revisions that finally sent the military government tumbling from power. However, Tricolor's organizational personality had been soured by the lack of popular support for French ultranationalism. Tricolor decided that the destiny of France could not be entrusted to the average citizen. It was instead the sacred (self-appointed) duty of Tricolor to ensure that the empire reattained its status as a superpower.

Tricolor has moved increasingly toward a policy that promotes its evolution into a lunatic fringe organization. It continues to recruit from almost every walk of life, demanding two personal qualities in any prospective member—tremendous reserves of determination and high native intelligence. A powerful belief in French supremacism is the prerequisite.

Tricolor learned of the mystery race speculation through one of its DGSE members who had access to the confidential forensics report issued jointly by the AIA and MI-5. Next, Tricolor received a sketchy report about the discovery and confirmation of Back Door and the mission that was being contemplated as a means of scouting it out. Upon learning that the Alderhorst Alliance had already secured control over Back Door and had hopes of making first contact with the mystery race, Tricolor could only gnash its teeth in envy—once again France was sitting by while other nations acted.

France had one resource that would be indispensable on a first contact mission—personnel from L'Institut des Études Xénologiques (IEX). The preeminent specialists in alien studies (both biological and sociological), the IEX gave Tricolor a legitimate "in" on Operation Back Door. A contact specialist would gain access to the aliens, and would run tests or advocate that one or more of the mystery race return with the team. So it was clearly within the power of Tricolor to obtain a live "alien" if any were encountered. However, Tricolor's ultimate plans for such an alien are far from clear.

Tricolor believes this epidemic would cripple the Kafer war effort, assuming the Kafers depend upon the Ylii for technical assistance. That would allow human ingenuity and technical innovation to overwhelm the Kafers. Tricolor also believes that any outrage over this tactic will be quickly forgiven and forgotten if the Kafer menace can be ended. Meanwhile, France will have shown its capacity for decisive and cunning action by bringing about the ultimate downfall of the Kafers.

Of course, France—and the rest of the world—would certainly not forgive and forget Tricolor's perpetration of this most horrendous of all crimes. France would suffer a degree of national disgrace and dishonor rivalled only by post-Nazi Germany after the horrible legacy of the death-camps became general knowledge. Tricolor—like the Nazis—cannot see this clearly because it is blinded by its own fanaticism.

STRIKING THE TRICOLOR

Where: Nanobiotech Associates, Boomtown, Olympus Mons, Mars.

What: Rescuing Vish.

The characters must break into the Nanobiotech compound and rescue Vish. Given the restriction against admitting unapproved personnel, however, there is no way to get inside via masquerade. Also, any schemes involving demolitions work or the like are inadvisable; the effects of depressurization on Mars are not much different than those experienced in deep space.

Consequently, the simplest and most brutish course of action makes sense—a cold-blooded assault into the Nanobiotech compound. While this will be neither easy nor safe, there are a few mitigating factors:

- The guards at Nanobiotech—although members of Tricolor—have grown complacent. With only one half-day pass every two weekends, they are tired of the complex, and their boredom has begun to show up as laxness on duty. If the characters are careful, their silenced weapons may allow them to remove the outermost door guards without even alerting the rest of the complex.

- The underculture of Boomtown includes dozens of individuals who are not adverse to an illegal operation—for a share of the loot. But not many of the low-lives are trustworthy, and some might snitch on the PCs to claim a reward from the grateful Nanobiotech staff.

- There is no shortage of black market weapons in Boomtown.

In the event of an attack, the entire staff of Nanobiotech will defend the installation. In addition to the 13 Experienced NPC guards are 14 Novice scientists and Dumaine. These individuals will be armed with a smattering of Arno 5-15 pistols and Guiscard FC-68 sporting rifles. Some will only have a few smoke and gas grenades to hurl. Dumaine will fight to the death and, if cornered, will charge the characters in a mad rush, trying to take as many along with him as he can.

The Nanobiotech complex is a tight, sterile amalgamation of modular living and working units. It is stark and claustrophobic, with narrow walkways and few open spaces. The referee should design a suitable floorplan, with the labs and the live-sample holding area located at the rear of the building (which has only one wall between it and the almost nonexistent Martian atmosphere). Any running firefight through this compound should be an adrenaline-surging sequence of room-to-room assaults at brutally short range.

The characters may find themselves getting the worst of the fight: Clearly, their adversaries are *not* about to take prisoners. In such situations, the referee may bring in the cavalry from over the hill—AIA agents from the FBI internal affairs division.

By the time the characters arrive on Mars, one of Larkin's data couriers may have successfully transferred his package to the FBI, which will immediately conduct a high-security (and confidential) search of all retinal security checks conducted within the past week or so inside the Sol System. The characters' arrival through OQC

will be picked up, and from there, a simple trace of the activity in their travel and credit accounts will reconstruct their movements and activities. While the FBI would not be empowered to interfere with the characters—or the suspected Tricolor agents—it would certainly keep a number of agents in the vicinity.

If the attack on the Nanobiotech installation goes poorly, the FBI tails will arrive in time to prevent the Tricolor people from finishing the characters off. If the characters seem able to handle things on their own, the FBI should show up mere seconds after the shooting has stopped—just in time to witness Vish's glad reunion with his human friends.

SUGGESTIONS TO THE REFEREE

For groups that have limited (or no) interest in combat between starships, this is probably the right place to end the adventure. However, for those who like a little rough-and-tumble between starships—and who are itching to score a few points against the Kafers—the conclusion should prove satisfying. While GDW's *Star Cruiser* rules are not required, they will greatly enhance the final clash of arms.

A MEETING OF THE MINDS

Where: New York City, America, Earth.

What: Vish and characters meet top international officials.

Vish refuses to go anywhere or do anything without the characters; these are the only humans he completely trusts. As a result, the characters will find themselves in a secret session of the International Security Council, a forum for the major spacefaring nations of the Earth. Appropriately enough, the ISC has its headquarters in the restored UN building in New York City. Here, Vish will demonstrate great poise (and patience) as he engages the representatives in several days of marathon discussions. On several occasions the PCs will be asked to try to bridge the communication gap when misinterpretations are due to cultural differences, not vocabulary failures.

At the conclusion of these meetings, the member nations of the International Security Council will resolve to pursue an alliance with the Ylii and dispatch an international defensive force to Ssuushni'a. The PCs are to escort Vish back to his homeworld aboard a frigate that Australia has detached for this special mission.

A FIGHT TO THE FINISH

Where: Along the Back Door route, terminating at Ssuushni'a.

What: A surprise naval engagement with the Kafers.

The PCs will retrace their steps back to DM+5 3409, although there will be no need to lay over in a system beyond the time it takes for the frigate to discharge its stutterwarp drive coils and be refueled. They will meet with Deputy Director Shamus Larkin, who is only too delighted to pay the player characters the agreed fees and present them with the fully repaired *Cat's Feet*.

With a *Sachsen*-class frigate as an escort, the characters and Vish travel on to system DM-4 4225. Here, they are instructed to rendezvous with the huge *Metal*-class freighter they have previously encountered in this system. However, on this occasion the purpose of the freighter becomes clear.

The *Metal* is a modular bulk cargo carrier, incorporating eight trailing clusters of nine cargo modules to haul its load. Each standard module provides a cargo volume of 742.5 cubic meters. However, this class of ship has been showing its age, and the great majority have been decommissioned and sold off by the original French owners.

Instead of seeing a dated freighter, however, the nations of the Alderhorst Alliance saw a potential stutterwarp tug with an extraordinary capacity. Buying one of the ships, they constructed new megamodules for it to carry. These megamodules are externally similar to one of the nine module-clusters. However, the megamodule is one hull, without any internal dividing bulkheads, with a contigu-

AIA

The AIA has its roots in the reformation of the United States of America in 2021, when the reintegration of the rival military and civilian governments was formalized and their respective intelligence agencies were merged. The CIA, DIA, FBI, DEA, and ATF (treasury department) field operation branches amalgamated into a single unified service, renamed the American Intelligence Agency. The agency was broken into the Office of Foreign Operations and the Office of Domestic Operations. Any crime committed on American soil or against American nationals abroad (or holdings in foreign countries) was the province of the ODO. Any operation that involved intrusive acts against the lands or citizens of other sovereign states was the province of the OFO. Almost all the DIA and much of the CIA wound up in the OFO. The rest filled the ODO.

The FBI was retained (in a diminished form) as a separate division of the ODO. The "new FBI" was constructed to be the forensics and criminology experts for the ODO, and to function as the internal affairs office for the entire AIA. The congressional committee that oversees and receives reports on the FBI's watchdog operations (the National Security Committee) quickly became one of the most powerful and influential (and demanding) assignments a congressperson could aspire to.

The AIA of 2302 has not changed much since its inception. Agents are still scrutinized for tendencies which might predispose them to the abuse of power. This does not mean the AIA is not given special legal exemptions to carry out tasks such as bugging, surveillance and assault on foreign installations. It *does* mean all exemptions and permissions *must* come from the NSC.

The *official* AIA HQ is in the rebuilt Washington, DC. The *actual* HQ is in the labyrinthine undergrounds beneath the Disneyworld National Archaeological Preserve of Orlando, Florida. The cover—and security—afforded by this location has proven effective. It has also provided the source of much of the agency's slang. Being recalled to headquarters means an agent "is going to the Magic Kingdom." Bugging devices are "Mickey's Ears." An excessively optimistic person is a "Poppins." The references are infinite.

Despite its focus on being the most advanced covert agency in the business, the AIA draws the line at cyber-enhancements. The AIA stresses personal training and excellence, and eschews artificial boosts, arguing, "What is truly yours never fails you." The motivation behind this exclusion is that cyberware has a capacity to negatively influence personality, psyche and empathy in humans. The AIA does not want its agents becoming distant, cold, insensitive—and possibly less concerned with law and justice.

AIA agents are usually recruited straight out of high school, although a previous career in academic, journalistic or law enforcement fields is acceptable. A prior hitch in the military is also acceptable, but the AIA is not in the business of hiring professional soldiers (i.e., 15-year vets need not apply). AIA agents are classified as investigators (primary career table, Law Enforcement) or operatives (primary career table, Field Agents). Unless the agent comes from a prior career in the military, the time spent until the first turning point will be more akin to military duty, and the agent will receive skills from one of the military tables (his choice). If this means more than six years of training, the individual is sure to have seen a fair amount of duty as a striker—a mix of special forces/SWAT duties. The overwhelming majority of such individuals are from the OFO. After this initial paramilitary training, all agents begin selecting skills from their primary table.

AIA agents are equipped to the very highest standards available and have access to just about any gadget known to man. An example is the highly effective silenced pistol designated the Smith & Wesson ISP 106. (See the sidebar on page 39.)

Ylii Remote Fighter

The Ylii, although military neophytes, are clever thinkers with a penchant for elegant solutions. Their universal adoption of spherical ship design is not only in symbolic keeping with their holistic worldview, but presents an aggressor with an insoluble shell game dilemma. In short, the aggressor cannot be sure whether he is confronting a sensor drone, refueling barge, or fighter. Appearing as nothing more than a silver sphere with a diameter of eight meters, the *Fastball* is designed to blend in with the other spheroid Ylii spacecraft—until it begins its operations.

The *Fastball* reflects many of the high-tech capabilities of the Ylii. The vehicle's extraordinary speed, sensors, hull material, and targeting computer are all at or above the cutting edge of human engineering. Perhaps the most impressive feature is the complex c^3 network the Ylii have evolved to optimize the strength of the remote-controlled *Fastball*.

The Ylii determined that a remote fighter would minimize losses of their scarcest resource—trained combat pilots. However, they also realized that in order for a remote fighter strategy to work, they had to evolve an uninterruptible command net. The Ylii built over 20,000 microwave uplink stations on the surface of Ssuushni'a. Many are prepared to assume direct control of a *Fastball*. Many more are slaved to relay transmitters emplaced in almost all the other spherical spacecraft orbiting the Ylii homeworld. Several more thousand chain and direct uplinks are located on each of Ssuushni'a's moons, undistinguishable from the other transmission and control equipment that dots the surfaces of these small worlds. This complex web of command and control relays is overseen by a Ylii supercomputer, with two backups on Ssuushni'a and one on each of the moons. In effect, the only way to turn off the *Fastball* is to completely pulverize Ssuushni'a and its moons—and that will take more time than an attacker can spare.

The *Fastball* can effect self-powered transit to or from orbit via its MHD thrust capability. This obviates total dependence upon orbital tenders and repair facilities. Instead, the *Fastball* heads back dirtside for its fuel and maintenance needs. It also allows the Ylii to call home the fighters in the event that they are being overwhelmed. However, the *Fastball* only carries enough fuel for a one-way trip, which means that the Ylii generally relaunch the *Fastball* as a payload on other vehicles or from their numerous slingshots, thereby delivering them to orbit with full fuel tanks.

Of course, there are drawbacks to the *Fastball*. Commands cannot be relayed any faster than the speed of light, so the operating range is limited, unless the Ylii accept tremendous reductions in reaction time. Also, the Ylii technical excellence does not extend to weaponry, as is evinced by the Guiscard LL-98 equivalent lasers that the *Fastball* mounts (although they are equipped with UTES). Furthermore, the *Fastball* is not a design that has much operational flexibility. Much of its power is highly dependent upon the spherical shellgame strategy, which is hard to import into every potential battle zone. Lastly, it takes time to build a vehicle as complex as the *Fastball*, and time may yet prove to be a scarcer resource than trained Ylii combat pilots.

Work Stations: None

General Information: *Warp Efficiency:* 4.754 *Plant:* 10 MW
MHD Fuel: 14.55 tons (2.5 hours of constant operations)
Range: 7.7 LY *Mass:* 205.6 tons *Cargo Capacity:* 0 *Comfort:* n/a *Total Life Support:* 0 *Solar Array:* 30 m² on vehicle surface, providing enough power for cold-start and communication systems *Price:* Unknown.

ous cargo volume of almost 6700 cubic meters each. When outfitted with berthing cradles, this allows these megamodules to serve as detachable ship-carrying bays. Each megamodule bay is capable of carrying up to six fighters, two small couriers (such as a *Merkur*), or even one whole *Sachsen*-class frigate.

In response to the Ylii request for assistance, the Alderhorst Alliance has decided to load up the *Metal*-class tug with an impressive number of vessels:

Megamodules 1-4: 4 *Sachsen*-class frigates (2 German, 1 American, and 1 Australian crew).

Megamodules 5-6: 9 fighters (6 American *FS-17A*, 3 German *Wespes*) and one courier berth (empty).

Megamodule 7: Extra fuel tankage (full).

Megamodule 8: Ordnance, spares, and 4 sealed environment modules, currently housing 23 academic and government specialists and 1 platoon of US Marines.

The sealed environment station modules are living and research modules that can be deployed in space or on a planet, each providing living and working space for up to 20 persons. Fitted with modular connectors, they can be joined into a ring and rotated, providing the comfort of a spin-habitat when deployed space-side.

Although the frigates and the *Cat's Feet* do not need the *Metal*-class freighter to make the remainder of the journey (no transit to Ssuushni'a involves a distance more than seven light-years), the fighters and other equipment need to be carried. Also, the logistics and refueling difficulties are lessened by employing the *Metal* as the carrier for the entire force.

Consequently, the *Cat's Feet* is snuggled into megamodule 6's empty courier berth, and the journey begins.

Upon entering system SS-27 6854, the *Metal*-class freighter will disgorge its considerable cargo and refuel from Ylii tankers sent by the Ylii leadership. The huge freighter will then depart the system. At this point, the referee may introduce a few military commander NPCs with whom the characters will be coordinating their actions.

After six days in-system, ships from the Ylii colonies in systems DK-33 1023 and DK+32 2390 will start arriving, reporting the movement of a small group of Kafer vessels through their space—apparently headed for Ssuushni'a. Four days later, sensors scattered above/below the system's ecliptic will report the arrival of several unidentified vessels of considerable size, all on a direct course for Ssuushni'a.

BATTLE OF SSUUSHNI'A

When: June 22, 2303 (or whenever the ongoing timeline indicates)

The PCs might wish to stay out of the fight or assume the role of the NPC commanders of the allied fleet and the Ylii remote fighter operators. Due to the command range restrictions upon the Ylii combat craft, this will predominantly be a defensive fight centering around Ssuushni'a. However, the Kafers have the disadvantage of not being able to distinguish the Ylii fighters from the other spherical craft of identical size also in orbit. Consequently, for every real Ylii remote fighter, the Kafers must consider four decoy fighters. Of course, real fighters are permanently identified as soon as they maneuver or shoot.

The human ships for this naval action are in GDW's *Star Cruiser* rules set. The *Cat's Feet* is described in the first episode of this adventure (**Challenge 49**). The Ylii vessel is described in this issue. The Kafer vessels are found either in the *Star Cruiser* rules set or GDW's **2300 AD** supplement *Invasion*.

In general, this battle should be a turkey-shoot for the defenders. The Kafer battleship is already weakened and is not toting a full complement of missiles because the Kafer Suzerain mounting this attack—V'Ded'Ah—is reserving as much force as possible to support a bid for power in the wake of Triumphant Destiny's demise. The battleship's captain and crew are not expecting anything other than token resistance and are half-expecting that they'll be able to take this planet all by themselves. Consequently, when the humans

emerge to attack along with the Ylii, the Kafers are likely not to have the time—or inclination—to think of aborting the mission and returning to report the human presence.

Intruder Objective: The Kafers intend to use this weak task force to disrupt the Ylii homesystem and seed a small ground force in preparation for full takeover.

Intruder Victory Conditions: Get one lander to the surface of Ssuushni'a and withdraw the battleship from the playing space.

Intruder Forces: 1 damaged *Alpha*-class battleship (with 21 *Whiskey*-class missiles), 2 *Foxtrot*-class fighters, 1 *Oscar*-class transport, 2 *Lima*-class landers, and 220 Kaffer troops, including several vehicles.

Native Objective: The Kafers must not learn (yet) that there is a human presence in the Ylii homesystem and that an alliance exists between the two forces.

Native Victory Conditions: Destroy or immobilize the Kaffer battleship before it can leave the playing space.

Native Forces: 4 *Sachsen*-class frigates, 6 *FS-17A*-class fighters, 3 *Wespe*-class fighters, 1 *Merkur IIb*-class courier (*Cat's Feet*) (with 3 SIM-14 missiles), 7 Ylii *RF8d Fastball*-class remote fighters, 28 Ylii decoy *Fastballs*.

Remote Ordnance: 6 SR-10 missile packs, 3 SIM-14 missile packs (both are for use on the *Sachsen* class), 4 Hyde Dynamic one-mission definite-kill missiles, 2 HD-5 scout sensor drones. Any ordnance beyond that which can be controlled by the human ships can be taken over by the Ylii control net.

SUGGESTIONS TO THE REFEREE

New adventure threads can grow out of this conclusion. You may decide to have one Kaffer lander make it to the planet. Without any preparation for a dirtside war, the Ylii may have to depend on the marine platoon and the PCs to hunt the Kafers down.

Or, if the PCs have enjoyed their interaction with Ylii society, they may wish to continue playing through their experiences as emissaries of

goodwill and cultural understanding. Or they can return to deep space in their hull (*Cat's Feet*), either as explorers along the newly re-opened American Arm, or even as a reconnaissance team probing into nearby Kaffer systems.

In any event, the characters will finish the adventure with more money than usual, a ship and a universe to explore.

Who could ask for more?

2300AD

Smith & Wesson ISP 106

The Smith & Wesson Integral Silencer Pistol 106 is more commonly known as the Shoot and Whisper.

Type: 6mm binary propellant automatic **Country:** USA
Weight (Empty): 0.4 kg **Length:** 17 cm (Bulk=0) **Action:** Single shot **Ammunition:** 6x14mm target-shedding sabot **Muzzle Velocity:** 450 mps **Magazine:** 10-round box **Magazine Weight:** 0.1 kg (including filled, disposable propellant cells) **ROF:** 3 **Aimed Fire Range:** 30 **Area Fire Burst:** 3 rounds **Area Fire Range:** 15 meters **DP Value:** 0.04 **Price:** Lv390 (Lv25 per magazine, Lv7 for a box of 100 rounds). Ω

Thus ends the four-part "Operation Back Door" adventure. For background information on this exciting series, refer to **Challenge 49, 50 and 51.**

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Dwellers in the DARK



By James L. Cambias

"Wilkins! Have you heard?" Smithers burst into our tent like an exploding shell.

"Must you be so abrupt? Now I've ruined the slide I was preparing."

"Never mind that scientific nonsense. There's been an accident—an ether flyer's gone down on the Dark Side!"

"Tragic. I fail to see why that makes it necessary for you to interrupt my work. If I am ever to make any progress cataloguing the fauna of Mercury..."

"There's a rescue being planned. Do you remember Sir Charles Moreton? The inventor chap? Well he's got a machine that can travel across the ice and needs volunteers to go along to search for survivors. What a scoop this will make!" Smithers began stuffing clothing and bottles of gin into his carpet-bag.

I sighed. "I suppose there's no way to dissuade you from going?"

"Just think, Wilkins! The first expedition to explore the Dark Side of Mercury!

The readers will eat it up! Aren't you coming along?" He closed the carpet-bag and shouldered his golf clubs.

"It seems I must—someone has to keep you out of trouble."

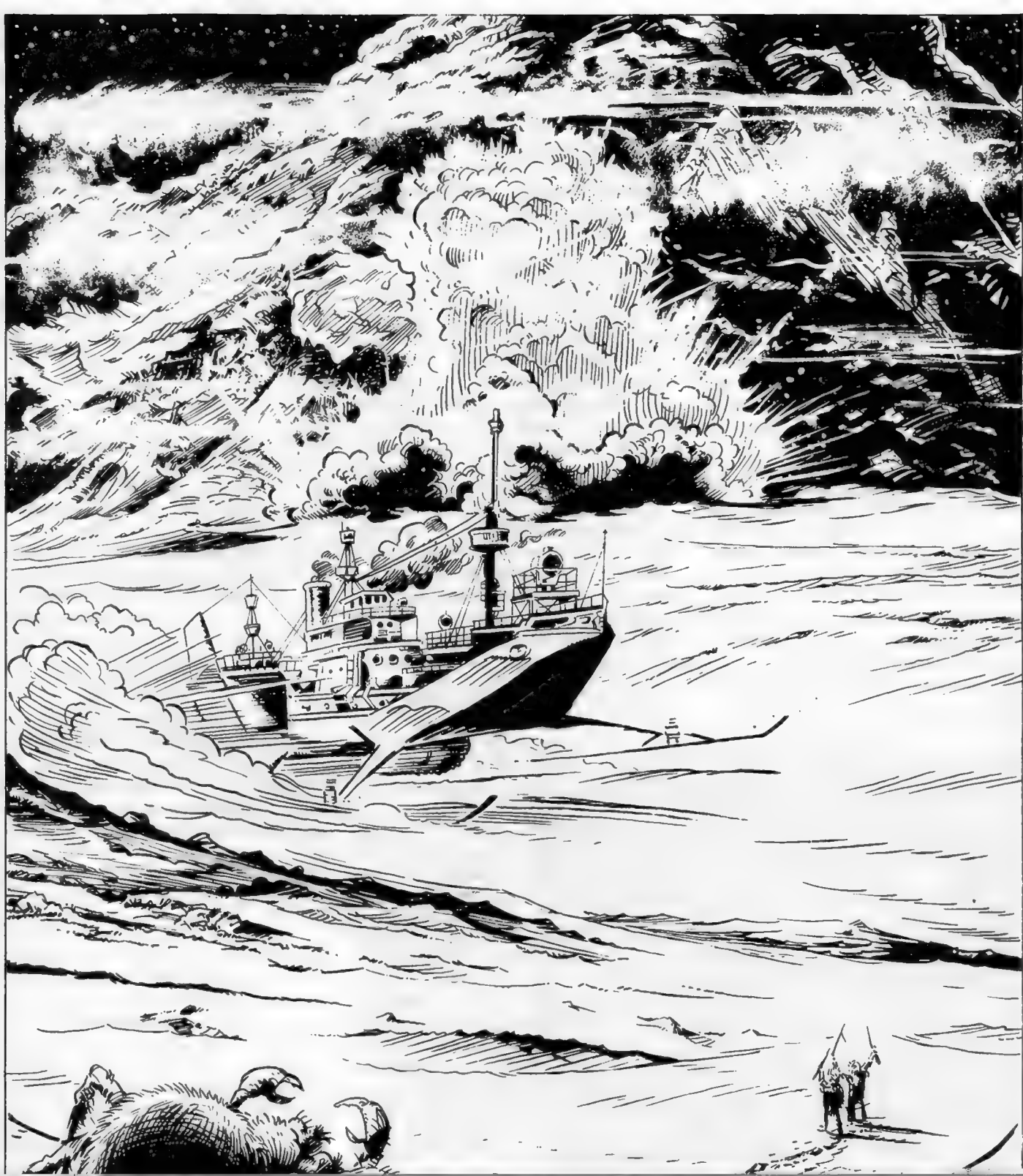
"Good man. Sir Charles was pleased when I told him you were joining the party."

The ether flyer *Hermes*, a commercial ship of Dutch registry, has crashed somewhere on the frozen Dark Side of Mercury after an accident during landing approach to Princess Christiana Station.

Some of the crew may still be alive within the wrecked ship, and a rescue mission must be mounted immediately. Extrapolation along the ship's last known course indicates that it must have come down some 400 miles from the base, in the Dry Ice Zone where the temperature hovers around -200°F .

Fortunately, Sir Charles Plunkett Drax Moreton is at Princess Christiana Station preparing his new steam sleigh for an expedition to investigate the mysteries of the Dark Side. He will offer to use his machine to mount a rescue expedition and will call for volunteers among the small population of the base.

Unfortunately, Sir Charles' assistant, Jack Topwash, is in fact a German spy who is aware of the fact that the *Hermes* was carrying



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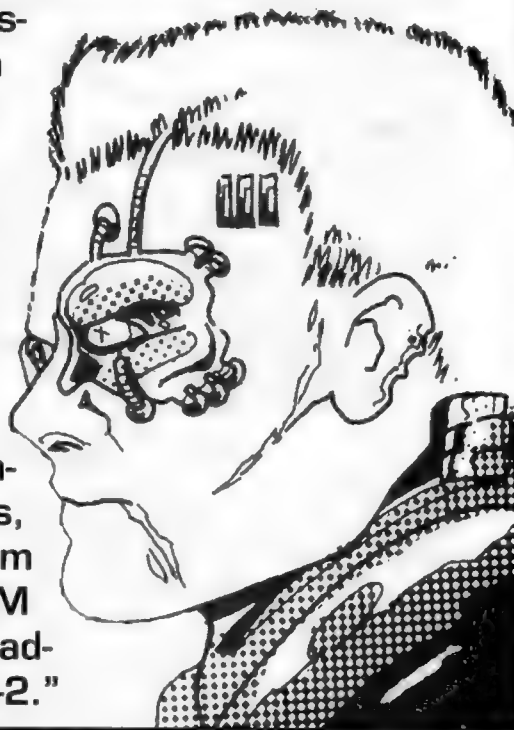
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contained environment for Chicago's New Edison employees and their families. With offices, living quarters, service departments, diplomatic embassies and a huge mall complex, the Arcology's inhabitants are in want of nothing. Of course, the street gangs and urban homeless who crowd the gutter districts around the Arcology are in a

completely different state, and that rich-poor juxtaposition breeds enmity and contempt: enough to send this Sprawlzone's residents into violent fits of rampaging and destruction — just what every *Cyberspace* adventurer needs!

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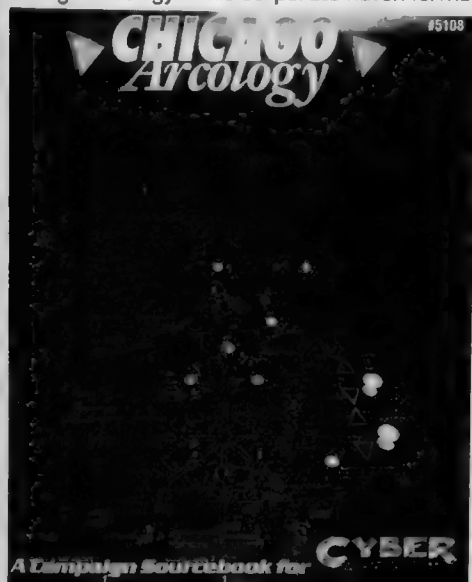
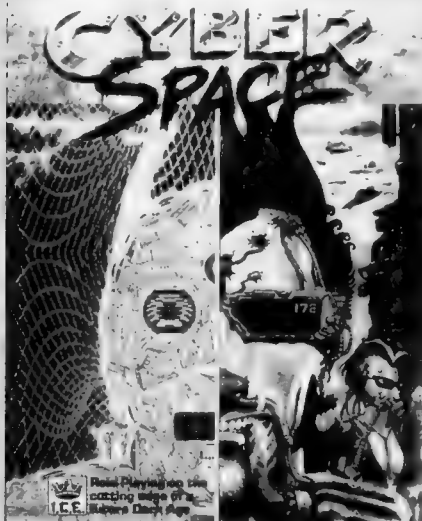
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Greedy, profiteering, cunning—the Ferengi are a powerful new player in the never-ending game of galactic coexistence.

Ferengi

By James P. Gee

The Federation's first recorded meeting with the Ferengi Empire occurred sometime around stardate 2/9033, when the exploration vessel *USS Stargazer* engaged and destroyed a hostile alien craft in the Maxia Zeta star system (it would be over nine years later before the identity of the ship was confirmed as Ferengi). About a year later rumors of a new economic entity operating along the Federation's spinward border began to circulate through the trade routes of the known galaxy, and the name Ferengi first appeared. Soon after, many independent merchants in that area began to report a surplus of otherwise rare technologies and products showing up in the local markets. Also many planets belligerent to the Federation and its new Klingon allies began to receive shipments of highly sophisticated weaponry from an unknown source.

The first formal, face-to-face contact with the Ferengi occurred only three years ago when the new *USS Enterprise* intercepted a large Ferengi craft (code named "Marauder") which had stolen a T-9 energy conversion unit from a Federation-held planet. Circumstances that developed, which remain classified at this time, forced the crews of the two vessels to work together; since this incident, the Ferengi have had more open contact with the races of the Federation, finding it to be a lucrative new market.

FERENGI CULTURE

Very little is known about the Ferengi culture and social structure other than scant information from brief encounters. These meetings are probably not good sources of objective data as the Ferengi, for the most part, believe that the free giving of anything, including information, is unprofitable, and thus undesirable. In Ferengi society, wealth equates directly with social status, so greed is the underlying force among these people. Rumors have it that almost all services in the Ferengi-dominated sphere are paid for (that is, the individual with the largest amount of money has the best medical care, best schooling, best protection and highest quality goods). This is a stark contrast to the Federation, where material needs have been all but eliminated.

Ferengi have in some encounters spoken highly of honor, but Ferengi do not fight honorably. They are an embodiment of the human phrase "the ends justify the means." They will do anything ranging from literal back-stabbing to mind control to double-crossing as long as they can gain from it. The only possible honor a Ferengi would be concerned about might be economic clout. After all, the prestige of being a good, or successful, merchant is no doubt foremost on a Ferengi's mind.

Everything in the eyes of a Ferengi is property—its purpose





is to gain its owner the most money in the most profitable way. The term "property" is also used to describe the Ferengi female. Some researchers

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speculate that problems in propagating the species have made healthy female Ferengi a valued commodity. Ferengi females are kept unclothed by their mates because it is believed that this state makes them less provocative to potential thieves. Also, many Ferengi males believe that females are not worth the expense of clothing.

MERCHANT NAVY

A little more is known about the nature of the Ferengi space fleet. According to many sources, the Ferengi Navy is not so much a single, unified force but a loose confederation of vessels joined together for a greater economic good. Star Fleet Intelligence Command's new Ferengi Contacts Branch has reported that a starship "daemon" must turn over a large percentage of his ship's profit to the Ferengi Naval Command in return for the use of the vessel. In this way, the naval command keeps relatively tight control over its various ships, especially since a daemon who is acting in an unprofitable manner usually will be relieved of command by another aboard who desires his position. Positions aboard Ferengi vessels seem to be somewhat the same as positions on Federation and KDF starships. Security responsibilities usually fall to the first or second officer. Also, unconfirmed reports show that the ship's doctor acts as a direct informant of the daemon's actions to the naval command, much along the same lines as the Imperial Security and Imperial Intelligence organizations in the Klingon sphere.

The daemon is the highest ranking official in the Ferengi fleet encountered by Star Fleet personnel, although intelligence operatives report the existence of other ranks which translate as "merchant first class" and "archtrader." A daemon seems to be assigned roughly to each sector and subsector in the Ferengi sphere of influence and thus acts in the position of a coordinator for all the Ferengi mercantile ventures in his area. It is believed that the large *Marauder*-class starships are used as mobile bases for this. Along those lines, daemons may be called upon by the Ferengi Naval Command to enforce an aspect of Ferengi policy or acquire special goods, properties, treaties, etc., much in the same way a starship captain acts as a representative of the Federation in some instances. Daemons may also have direct, or perhaps indirect, control over the smaller Ferengi vessels in their areas (These small vessels have been confirmed on long-range sensor sweeps, although they tend to avoid alien craft as much as possible.)

SCOPE OF THE EMPIRE

The term "Ferengi Empire" may be somewhat of an incorrect statement. The Ferengi do control a few planets within the Federation Exploration Treaty Zone, and they use them chiefly as bases for the navy and also as merchant outposts. They do not, however, seem to colonize worlds on the mass scale as humans have. As of yet, there is no defined border for Ferengi territory, and even most Ferengi-controlled worlds have not been recognized as such by the UFP. Rather, the Ferengi Empire is an empire of trade. The reason the Ferengi are not that concerned with territorial gain is simple—bigger borders

mean bigger costs. If Ferengi society as a whole reflects the structure of the navy, there is no central body that will pay for the construction, maintenance, defense, and administration of vastly spread colony worlds. It is just not profitable enough. More to the point, several large Ferengi centers of trade are not needed as similar facilities are abundant in Federation-controlled space. Already, Ferengi vessels frequent many of the larger ports of call on the outer edge of the UFP.

The exact size of the Ferengi sphere of influence is not known. Ferengi ships seem to be spreading as fast as possible through the newfound Federation frontier with the hopes of greater profit. Already the trade empire has extended itself along the spinward border of known space even as far as Betazed, nearing Tholian territory. Also, Ferengi ships have been sighted in the sectors along the now-defunct Organian Treaty Zone, although the Klingon Defense Force has done an adequate job of preventing them from penetrating the main Komerex Klingon. As a whole, the Ferengi Empire is a nation of great wealth, so much so that smaller independent societies, such as the Orions, have been crushed under the Ferengi economic machine.

While they have referred to their homeworld as Ferengal, its location remains a mystery, although it undoubtedly lies somewhere along the Federation's spinward border. Evidence points to it as a class-M planet, with possibly a thin atmosphere (which the acute hearing of the Ferengi is attributed to).

FERENGI PHYSIOLOGY

The Ferengi are a semihumanoid species. They have large, oversized ears extending out from a bridge along the forehead and enjoy atypically acute hearing. The forehead and back of the head both seem to be lobed into two separate halves. Ferengi have sharply pointed, small teeth and a ridged, flat nose. Most Ferengis stand somewhat erect, although they do tend to move hunched, especially in situations of extreme

stress. Average stature is about 1.5 meters, but Ferengi are exceptionally strong for their size.

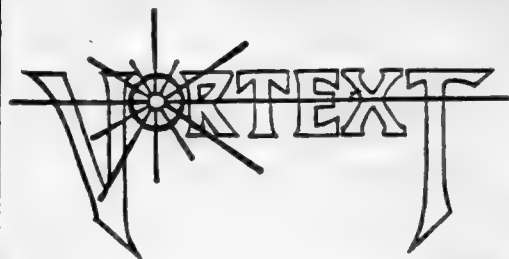
The Ferengi brain has a unique structure. Unlike the dual-lobed nature of most humanoid stock, the Ferengi mind is broken into four separate lobes. This is a rare structure among humanoid species, although not entirely unheard of. A benefit is that all telepaths of the Federation, including Betazoids, cannot read Ferengi thoughts whatsoever. Indeed, to a Betazoid, a Ferengi person seems to be "just not there." It is unknown whether or not Ferengis are immune to, say, Vulcan mind melds.

FERENGI AS NPCS

The following are the formulas given in FASA's *Next Generation First Year Sourcebook* for deriving attributes for Ferengi (male) NPCs. While the PSI skill is listed here, remember that the Ferengi are "mind-blind" in the eyes of most Federation telepaths: STR 50+4D10, CHA 3D10, END 1D100, LUC 1D100, INT 1D100, PSI 2D10, DEX 40+5D10.

While the *First Year Sourcebook* claims that the Ferengi energy whip is the standard side-arm of the Ferengi Navy, episodes from *The Next Generation*'s third season have shown that they also utilize what appear to be phaser-like weapons. Since this weapon is undoubtedly a copy of the Federation version, use the statistics for the Phaser I-B as its operating parameters as well.

The Ferengi offer a unique opportunity to a referee. Here is an adversary to the Federation with no recognized borders. Their exploits so far are centered within the recognized boundaries of the Federation Exploration Zone, and they have visited many of the outer Federation worlds, including Betazed. When used with finesse, Ferengi NPCs can add a new twist to any adventure. Be wary, however, of using them simply as "heavies," a blatant waste of their true potential. While Ferengi motives may be simple, their methods are complex. Above all, the Ferengi are a mysterious race who roam the galaxy for profit. Ω



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Attack of the Ice-Age Cyborg Kamikaze Holsteins

By Lester W. Smith



For tens of thousands of years, cows have been the predominant intelligent race in our galaxy—every place except on Earth, that is. For some reason, Terran cows just never developed an interest in organic chemistry, quantum mechanics, or electrodynamic prototypical space-time flux science. Instead, they remained content to bask in the sun, munch grass, and crowd together under one tree during lightning storms.

From the very beginning, this lack of ambition seriously disturbed the United Galactic Council, especially considering the fact that Terran humans were beginning to show every sign of evolving in the cows' stead. While humans were learning how to hit things with rocks and how to use fire, the Council debated long and heatedly, but eventually it was decided that the planet should be allowed to pursue its own course—if Terran cows hadn't the spunk to go out and explore the galaxy, then that was their problem.

But there were those among the UGC who stood on the other side of the fence. These were the renegade Holsteins. The Holsteins believed that it was their duty to make Terran cows evolve, so they set about doing just that. Fearing Council censure, however, they kept their plans secret. Clandestinely, they fitted a starship with an experimental laboratory designed to produce a fluid which, when fed to Terran cows, would propel them out of the Grass Age and into space. This laboratory was code-named the "Unified Device for Dispensing Evolutionary Readjustment," or UDDER for short.

Unfortunately, the lab was so large that it would not completely fit into a standard starship. But the Holsteins were up to the challenge. First, they redesigned their ship's interior, knocking out unnecessary walls, scratching from the designs any room that wasn't absolutely necessary. (They kept the engine room and bridge, for instance, but got rid of the brig, or "cow poke.") Also, they built the lab so that its dispensers extended through the floor of the vessel, thereby saving quite a bit of room. Next, they set about trimming the crew size to the bare minimum. They culled their herd of applicants until only a handful of the very best individuals remained. Then they

heavily enhanced those cows cybernetically to make them equal to the rigors of the mission.

In the end, they decided upon a crew of four: Four cows dedicated to the proposition that every bovine creature had a destiny among the stars; four cows willing to suffer hardships to take to their primitive Terran cousins news of just how underprivileged they were; four cows who would travel to a backward planet where savage humans were learning to hunt and eat cattle; four cows with a death wish. Thus were born the Cyborg Kamikaze Holsteins (CKHs).

Cost overruns and production delays held up the launching of the mission for several centuries, and by the time the CKHs reached Earth, the planet had entered another of its ice ages. Not for a moment did the CKHs—now ICKHs (Ice-Age Cyborg Kamikaze Holsteins)—think of turning back, however. They had a mission to perform, and they were bound and determined to accomplish it. Desperately, they cast about for some safe place to land and finally settled (literally) on a major glacier in what is now far northern Canada.

Unfortunately, Terran ice proved too fragile for the weight of the starship, and the Holsteins' vessel sunk into the glacier's depths. With no hope of escaping until the planet thawed, the ICKHs entered their CSIPs (Cattle-leptic Sleep Inducer Pods) and prepared to wait it out. As they slept, they dreamed their dreams of global conquest.

Now it is the 20th century (in case you hadn't noticed), and somewhere on a mountain far to the north, the last of the ice has melted from the Holsteins' craft. Freed from their aeons-long sleep, the ICKHs have emerged to begin a reign of terror upon the Earth. As their power spreads, one question begs to be answered: Who ya gonna call?

REEL ONE: "HOOFING IT TO CANADA"

As this reel opens, Theophylus Brown, a Canadian dairy farmer, calls the Ghostbusters and says he thinks his farm is haunted. Brown has been hearing voices whispering conspiratorially all over his farm, but when he looks, no one is there but him and his cows. Sometimes, when he goes to the barn, he finds the door locked from the inside and hears voices murmuring within. Then, for no apparent reason, the door will unlock; when he searches the barn, again no one is there but him and the cows. And while milk production remains normal, cattle feed consumption is way down. Brown's cows just don't seem to be as hungry any more.

Of course, the voices Brown is hearing are not ghosts, but rather his cows. The ICKHs have been visiting his farm, feeding their UDDER milk to the cows, and now those cows have become intelligent enough to talk. Most of what they're

Note 1: In this adventure, "cow" is used as a generic term for cattle of either sex (as per the word's secondary usage according to Merriam-Webster). It is not intended to indicate a gender bias.

Note 2: This adventure is rated P (excessive punning). Reader discretion is advised.



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GHOSTBUSTERS™ *International*

Name: Byron, Shelley, Keats and Wordsworth

Goal: Free Earth's cattle from slavery and incite them to take a place among the stars.

Physical X Ectoplasmic (Check One) Intelligent X Mindless (Check One)

Species or Race: Bovine cyborg

Sex: Bull

Age: Multiple tens of thousands of years.

Hair Color: Predominantly white, black and brown

Eye Color: Brown (of course)

Height: 8-9 feet (standing upright)

Weight: 900+ lbs.

Tags: These cows stand upright on their hind legs, which makes them tower above humans. The long, heavy cow bodies walking upright on spindly cow legs might seem silly were it not for all the frightening cybernetic equipment sprouting from them. The ICKHs have no sense of humor, nor any emotion other than dedication to their mission. They speak in a continual, mechanical monotone.

TRAITS	ROLL		TALENTS	ROLL
	Normal	Current		
Brains	(2)	()	Astronomy	5
Muscles	(5)	()	Break Things	8
Moves	(2)	()	Jump	5
Cool	(4)	()	Lock Horns*	7
Power	(4)	()		
Ectopresence	(0)	()		

***Lock Horns (New Skill):** These cows are nigh unemotional and bullishly dedicated to their mission. They can use the Lock Horns skill to resist the effects whenever a Ghostbuster tries to deter them from their goal.

SPECIAL ABILITIES

Flight, Invisibility. Note for city-dwelling readers: These powers are not natural to cows. But the ICKHs have gained them as a result of extensive cybernetic modification.

WEAKNESSES

Defense Cracker, Inhibitor. The first represents the fact that if the ICKHs' UDDER machine is somehow destroyed, the ICKHs will be unable to complete their plan for fostering a cattle revolution on Earth. The second represents the fact that if the United Galactic Cowncil members get wind of the ICKHs' activities, they will step in to put a stop to it immediately.

HISTORY & NOTES

Renegades from a galaxy-spanning confederation of cow civilizations, the ICKHs are determined to free Terran cattle from their bondage to humans and to introduce them to a space-age perspective. The ICKHs look upon humans as jackals robbing Terran cows of their destiny.

ENTITY TOUGHNESS

Day's Work.

Power (4)
Traits (6)

Ectopresence (7)
Special Abilities (2 (1G, 1L))

about is whether or not to take the ICKHs up on their offer to help them rule the world. They've been ruminating on the idea for a couple of weeks now without coming to any conclusion. On the one hand, they figure, it might be kind of nice to become space-farers, like the legendary cow that jumped over the moon. On the other hand, they have a pretty cushy position right where they are. Needless to say, the ICKHs are disappointed in Brown's cows' lack of initiative.

The Ghostbusters will have to travel to the farm, but once they arrive there, the cows will keep perfectly silent to avoid giving their developing intelligence away. (Although if one of the Ghostbusters manages a Brains roll at Whole Lots of difficulty, that character may hear the words "Cheese it; here they come" as they approach the barn, but nothing else.) PKE tests reveal no paranormal energy. To all appearances, the dairy farm is completely normal, and Farmer Brown is off his rocker. This lack of supporting evidence will make Brown feel very foolish, to say the least. As the investigation progresses, he grows more and more apologetic, more and more desperate to make small talk with the Ghostbusters to cover up his embarrassment.

Finally, after the entire farm has been searched thoroughly with no evidence of ghosts, Brown tries to change the subject entirely. Leaning on the hindquarters of a nearby cow, he says "So, how do you city boys like this dairy air?" "I beg your pardon!" the cow says, indignantly, and kicks Farmer Brown a distance of several yards. (She thinks she's being made the butt of a joke.) Realizing that the cat is out of the bag, all of Brown's cows break loose and begin a stampede north, toward the ICKHs' starship. (The Ghostbusters should make Moves rolls at A Good Amount of difficulty to avoid being trampled in the stampede.) The cows have no idea what to do about the situation, so they are going to their mentors for help. The Ghostbusters can follow cross-country in Farmer Brown's truck.

REEL TWO: "THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA"

This is the climactic scene of the adventure, and the ghostmaster should milk it for all it's worth. The ICKHs find themselves with quite a problem when Brown's cows arrive. On the one hoof, they don't want to leave the Terran cows to face the wrath of the Ghostbusters, nor do they want to face the Ghostbusters themselves. On the other hoof, their starship will barely hold a crew of four, which makes escaping difficult.

In the end, they manage to herd everyone on board just before the Ghostbusters arrive. When they take off, however, the additional weight makes it very difficult for the vessel to gain altitude, and the crowding makes it hard to steer. The ship slews back and forth across the sky, and for a moment it looks as if it will crash heavily into a pasture, but at the last moment it pulls up, just grazing the field. The Ghostbusters are easily able to keep up with it in Farmer Brown's truck, and they can blast at it with their proton packs, making the ICKHs' attempts to fly even more difficult.

Hitting the lumbering ship with the proton packs involves Very Little difficulty, and if any of the Ghostbusters makes a success roll of Whole Lots of Success or more, it spells UDDER disaster for the ICKHs. In effect, the ship has been creamed. That is, the evolutionary milk device explodes, spraying dairy products over the countryside for miles around, and the starship crashes into a haystack. The Terran cows come spilling out and scatter in all directions. The Ice-Age Cyborg Kamikaze Holsteins climb out and set themselves for a fight.

REEL THREE: "SHOOTING THE BULL"

Now the Ghostbusters get to meet the critters that are behind the sudden

IQ jump of Farmer Brown's cows. For their part, the ICKHs will prepare to sell themselves dearly; they refuse to be cowed by the fact that the Ghostbusters have destroyed their ship. Of course, with their powers of Flight and Invisibility, they should be able to put up an interesting fight. Whether they win or lose this battle makes little difference on a worldwide scale, however.

The Ghostbusters have managed to deal the ICKHs enough of a setback to prevent them from leading a general Terran cattle revolt, and the destruction of the starship has drawn the attention of the United Galactic Council, which will prevent the Holsteins from pursuing the plot any further.

What does remain to be decided by the battle is whether or not the ICKHs escape. If the Ghostbusters manage to round them up, members of the UGC will secretly send a representative to collect them, and they will make the Ghostbusters honorary members of the Council, as long as the Ghostbusters agree to keep the UGCs' existence secret from the rest of humanity. If, on the other hand, the ICKHs best the Ghostbusters, they will escape to plot their revenge.

In any case, as the effects of the stellar milk wear off, Farmer Brown's cows will revert to their original intelligence level and return to the placid existence they once had. And Brown will have a wonderful tall tale to tell his grandchildren when they come to visit. Ω

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Urban Beasts for *NightLife*

By Lester W. and Jennifer A. Smith

you've seen *Night of the Living Dead* (who hasn't?), *The Lost Boys*, and *Nightbreed*, and you've read *The Vampire Lestat* so many times you've nearly memorized it. You loved *The Howling* and *Wolfen*. You're dying (no pun intended) to roleplay an ultraslick vampire or a cagey werewolf, but most games relegate them firmly to the roles of evil NPCs.

Where can you go to satisfy your craving?

The answer is *NightLife* by Stellar Games.

NightLife, the self-proclaimed "roleplaying game of urban horror," is devoted to a style of horror known as "splatterpunk." What really makes *NightLife* unique, however, is that all player characters are monsters of one sort or another, and they are all part of a secret subculture in New York City.

NightLife's horror is serious. Just as in *Call of Cthulhu*, where characters have to balance their need for a growing knowledge of the Cthulhu mythos versus a resultant loss of Sanity points, characters in *NightLife* must balance a need to feed on humans against a resultant loss in Humanity points. The longer you go between feedings, the weaker your supernatural abilities become.

If you let your Humanity drop too far, the loss begins to snowball, and soon you find you've lost all Humanity and have become nothing but a mindless horror.

There are a host of different PC creatures in *NightLife*, and even more that serve as NPC races. But strangely enough, virtually no animals are detailed (Gorehounds being the one exception, and excluding the vampires' and weres' animal forms).

In this article, therefore, we present you with a number of animals to include in your *NightLife* adventures.

Creature Statistics

Animal	STR	DEX	FIT	INT	WILL	PER	ATT	LUCK	HTHD	SP	MOVE
Bat*	0	35	5	1	2	15	1	14	1	19	54
Cat	2	32	7	1	3	15	20	20	2	27	21
Coyote	5	25	11	3	5	30	10	20	3	31	33
Crow*	1	38	4	1	4	25	3	17	1	21	36
Dog	4	22	9	2	2	20	17	12	3	21	27
Pigeon*	0	17	2	1	1	10	13	10	0	12	18
Rat	0	40	3	3	5	30	1	18	1	21	3

*This creature's MOVE score is while flying.

Abbreviations: STR: Strength DEX: Dexterity FIT: Fitness INT: Intelligence WILL: Will PER: Perception ATT: Attractiveness LUCK: Luck HTHD: Hand-to-Hand Damage (base HTHD+bonuses from teeth, claws, etc.) SP: Survival points MOVE: Movement rate, in feet per battle turn (six seconds).

SNARL

STR: 0 PER: 18 DEX: 35 ATT: 0 FIT: 24 LUCK: 37 INT: 0 BHTHD: 8 WILL: 35 SP: 24 Max Humanity: 0 Edges: Drain (Anguish), Fear Projection Flaws: Environmental Harm (Sunlight: 6 SP/BT) Humanity Damage Modifier: None Skills: None Faction: None

Snarls are so named not because of any sound they make, but rather because each is a twisted collection of animal spirits, tangled together like a snarled skein of yarn. The bulk of the spirits are those of pets that died after being abandoned, or of those that were struck by an auto and took an excessively long time to die. In appearance, a snarl looks like a boiling fog, within which can be seen ghostly images of starved or mangled cats, dogs and other pets, as well as rabid rats, snakes and even coyotes, all clambering ferociously over one another in a tangled mass. A snarl has no real intelligence, but simply attacks whatever it encounters, projecting onto it victims its own intense suffering and thereby driving the victim to madness (typically resulting in suicide)—or at least into a panic in which the victim injures itself while trying to get away. In either case, the snarl then feeds off the anguish it has caused.

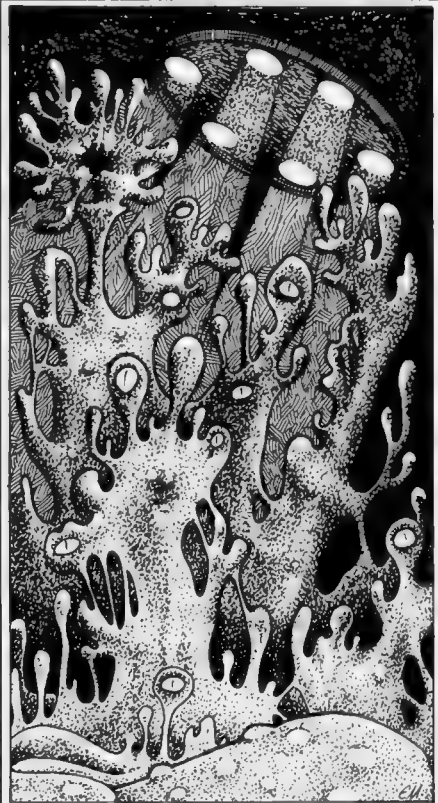


TRASH PUPPY

STR: 30 PER: 25 DEX: 10 ATT: 0 FIT: 40 LUCK: 12 INT: 0 BHTHD: 14 WILL: 40 SP: 52 Max Humanity: 0 Edges: Induce Heart Attack Flaws: Environmental Harm (Running Water: 1 SP/gallon/BT) Humanity Damage Modifier: None Skills: Tracking Faction: None

New York has been legendary for its strikes by trash collectors. But even at the best of times it suffers from a surplus of garbage. Much of its refuse blows into gutters and alleyways, where it collects, compacts and soaks up liquid wastes, becoming an unrecognizable, foul-smelling muck. Sometimes a particularly noisome pile will soak up something more as well—the psychic residue of suffering from drug addicts, mugging victims and the homeless. When that happens, it can give “birth” to a trash puppy. Trash puppies are animated, quadruped (generally) mounds of garbage that can feel the suffering of humans. They try to quell suffering in a particularly horrific way—they stalk the streets in a mindless search for sufferers, which they then suffocate beneath their load of decaying trash. Each time a trash puppy suffocates someone, there is a chance that its energies will be dispelled and it will “die.” The referee should roll versus the trash puppy’s Will score, and if that roll is successful, the trash puppy “gives up the ghost.” Trash puppies can also be destroyed by deluging them with water, which breaks up the gluey bonds that hold them together (a fire hose makes an excellent weapon against trash puppies). By and large, the Kin loathe trash puppies. For one thing, in their mindlessness, trash puppies threaten to alert human society to the supernatural underground. For another, in killing humans so senselessly, they waste perfectly good meat.

NIGHTLIFE



SLOUGH

STR: 0 PER: 13 DEX: 12 ATT: 0 FIT: 38 LUCK: 10 INT: 0 BHTHD: 24 WILL: 6 SP: 48 Max Humanity: 0 Edges: Weapons Immunity Flaws: Unknown Humanity Damage Modifier: None Skills: None Faction: None

Liquid wastes, solid wastes, powerful chemicals and an occasional pet or two—all are things that find themselves flushed into the New York City sewer system, whether from private toilets, street gutters, or industrial waste pipes. Recently, this rich stew has given rise to a new life form, much as life on Earth is said to have originated in a rich mix of chemicals. The Kin call this new creature the slough, and it is basically a gigantic, mindless blob of acidic mucous that dissolves and consumes anything it can catch. Fortunately, the slough cannot move very swiftly. Unfortunately, no one knows the true extent of its size. The Kin believe one exists, and steps are being taken to destroy it. Until some means can be devised of doing so, however, an occasional sewer worker will continue to disappear, falling prey to the slough. Ω

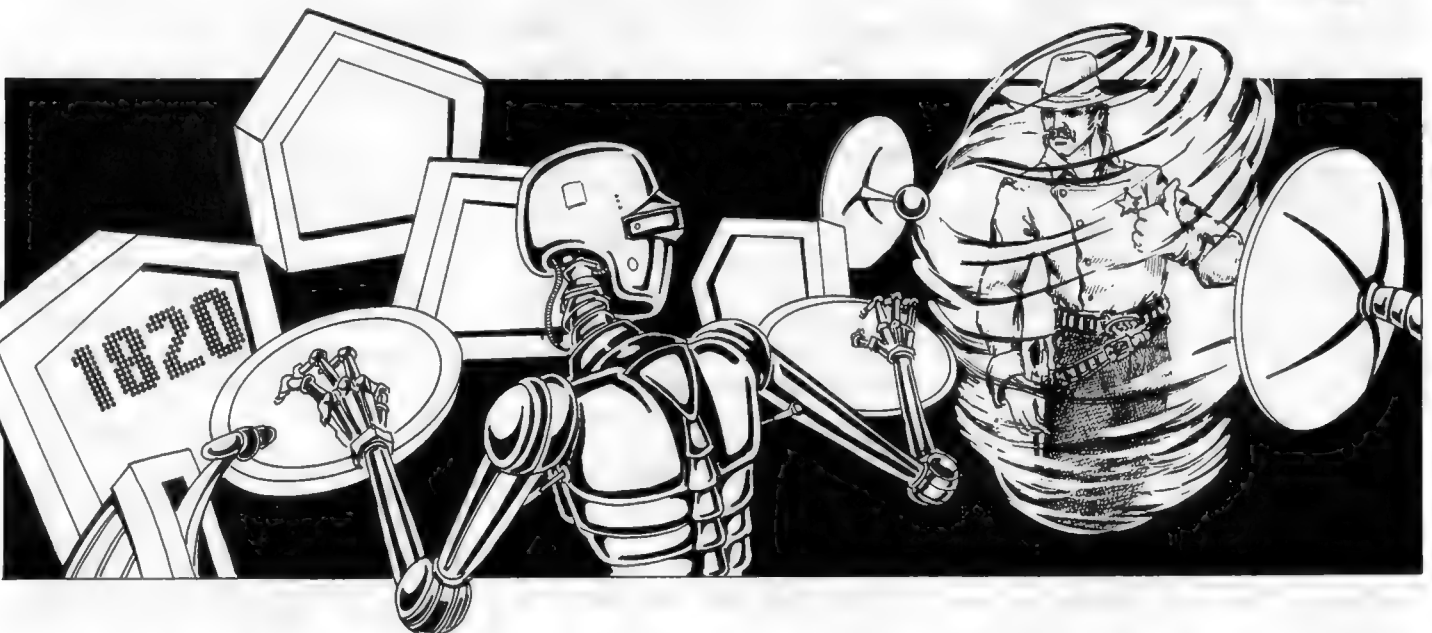
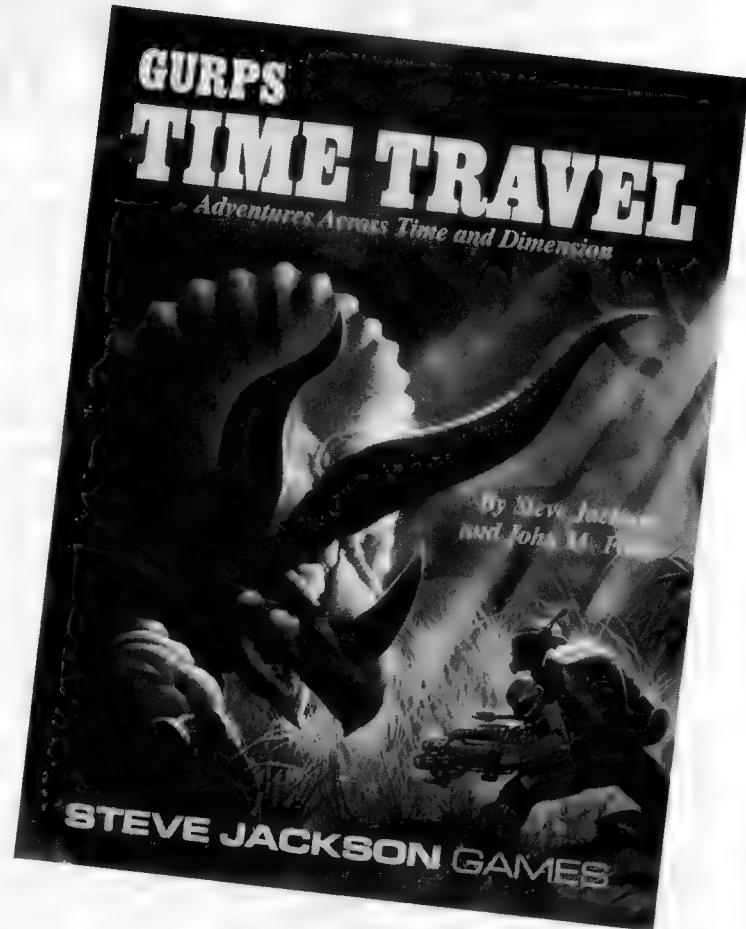
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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

The Night Was Fluffy

The night was fluffy and full of possibilities. Professor Johnson could feel the goose-down of tension in the air as he stood atop his stony fortress. "At last!" he bellowed. "At last, my device is ready! Now, nothing can stop me! They laughed at me at the university! Called me mad! Me, the greatest genius of all time, mad!" (Insane laughter, insane laughter, insane laughter.) "They said my experiments were insane! Now, I can show them all, show them who the real genius is when I destroy an entire dimension!" (Insane laughter, insane laughter, insane laughter.)

"Igor, lower the table into the fluff!" The mechanical, hunchbacked man began to turn a great wheel, lowering the sheet-covered table into a vat of synthetic fur.

Without further plot exposition, the professor reached for large double knife switch, situated high on the huge, flashing console. Just then, a great roaring came to the madman's ears, like the sound of a thousand plush teddy bears screaming and gnashing their teeth. The evil sound originated from the vat and was gradually getting louder.

"It is too soon! Too soon!" raved the madman. "We must escape them, before it's too late! Come, Igor! To the escape capsule!"

Bare inches ahead of the ravaging horde of cute animals, the doctor reached the escape capsule. From behind him came a terrible scream as his faithful assistant was swallowed up by the wave of plush bodies. The capsule doors closed just as the first of the cute animals leapt at his throat. With a resounding boom, the capsule blasted off, leaving the planet behind, but the doctor did not feel relieved.

His only thought was, "I shall return...."

Dr. Johnson, noted mad scientist, had taken up residence on the planet Kvetchenstien to resume the experiments that got him expelled from "The University." Whether or not the doctor worked at a university is questionable—he might have made the whole thing up for dramatic effect.

His lifelong ambition is to build a machine that can destroy an entire dimension.

For a test subject, he chose a small dimension he thought no one would ever miss. Unfortunately, the dimension he chose was the origin of the CuteDeath bears, the power source of the Guttem CuteDeath grenade. Perceiving a threat to their profit margin, the board of directors of Guttem authorized a little espionage. Their spy planted a huge CuteDeath bomb under the doctor's fluff vat, a bomb that opened a permanent portal to the dimension of the evil plush monsters.

MONDAY, THE FLOATING VAGABOND

This has been a pretty strange morning for you. One irritation led to another. The final straw was the freak downpour that soaked you in seconds. In desperation, you ducked into the nearest dry place (which happened to be a bar). To your complete surprise, you found yourself here: The Floating Vagabond, the self proclaimed bar at the center of reality. You somehow overcame your shock



By Nick Atlas

With Supplementary Weirdness From Evan Haag, Doug Foreman,
John Pries, Mike Rybarczyk and Leslie Tatro

and sat at the bar, right between an octopoid movie director and a Scythian warrior/mage. The bartender, Spit, gave you your first drink free, and you've been here ever since.

From the corner of the bar, at a table, you see a man in a white lab coat arguing with someone who looks and sounds remarkably like a three-foot-tall Jack Nicolson.

"Please, take the job. I can pay you well," the lab-coated one implores.

"Look, I don't need your gahd-damned money."

"But I can pay you well...."

The dialogue continues for awhile, then the Nicolson-lookalike leaves. If the PCs don't approach the doctor, he will come to them. His offer is two C-Notes per PC—half in advance and half on delivery. According to the doctor, he was working on an experiment to save an entire dimension from the depredations of horrid monsters. These monsters broke into his lab before his machine could be activated and destroyed it. The only part he cannot duplicate is the power source—a small but potent green globe that is half encased in circuitry. The doctor wants the PCs to retrieve the power source from the main console of his lab, located in a castle on the planet Kvetchenstien. If the globe or any of the circuitry is damaged on delivery, he will only pay half the PCs' fee.

CUDDLY DOOM

If the PCs accept his offer, the doctor will hail a Janee robot cab. She has a thick New York accent and will talk all the way about her terrible robot husband and wonderful robot son. All the while, she will careen through space at breakneck speeds, barely missing several asteroids, other ships and even a light post. As the cab nears the planet, a huge starship will come into view, firing a single shot that sends the cab into crash mode. All the PCs will survive, but Janee won't make it.

By some remarkable coincidence or plot contrivance, the crash site is within five miles of the castle—the PCs will see it as they go down. Roll 2D6 once per half mile travelled on the Random Fuzzy Plush Death Table.

RANDOM FUZZY PLUSH DEATH

Roll	Result
2	Peaceful plush rabbits. These rabbits are actually friendly and will bind the PCs' wounds with special bandages (1D6 Oops! points. This is an excellent life-saving encounter). If the PCs attack them, the rabbits will simply die without a fight. These creatures travel in a tribe of 20.
3	Plush snapping turtles with martial arts weapons. The plush snapping turtles are very slow. The only way that the PCs could possibly be threatened is wait for the turtles to catch up. Each turtle has a different one of four plush martial arts weapons (nunchaku, sword, sai, staff) that will do no damage (after all, they are stuffed toys). They otherwise seem to be ordinary stuffed snapping turtles. Each turtle bite does 1D6 Oops! points damage. <i>STR</i> : 3 <i>NIMB</i> : 1 <i>AIM</i> : 1 <i>SMRT</i> : 1 <i>COOL</i> : 2 <i>CS</i> : 1 <i>LUCK</i> : 4 <i>OOPS</i> : 15 <i>Skills</i> : Crawl Really Slow-Expert (4), Bite Things-Expert (6), Swing Plush Martial Arts Weapon-Professional (5) <i>Number Appearing</i> : 1D4.
4	Vicious fuzzy dice. These fuzzy dice are bound together in pairs and have gaping toothy maws where their sixes should be. A frequent strategy for them is to hang from trees by their elastic bands and drop on unwary travellers. Their bite does 1D4 Oops! points per pair. <i>STR</i> : 2 <i>NIMB</i> : 4 <i>AIM</i> : 4 <i>SMRT</i> : 2 <i>COOL</i> : 1 <i>CS</i> : 1 <i>LUCK</i> : 4 <i>OOPS</i> : 6 <i>Skills</i> : Bite Things-Expert (5), Drop on Things-Expert (7), Look Really Tacky (similar to Intimidation skill)-Hack (3), Generate Random Numbers-Professional (8) <i>Number Appearing</i> : 1D10 pair.

Plush monkeys.

The monkeys have six stuffed coconuts each. When thrown, the coconuts inflict 1D4 Oops! points damage. The monkeys will do normal fist damage and can bite for 1D4+1 Oops! points. *STR*: 4 *NIMB*: 4 *AIM*: 3 *SMRT*: 2 *COOL*: 3 *CS*: 2 *LUCK*: 3 *OOPS*: 16 *Skills*: Climb-Expert (7), Throw Plush Coconut-Hack (5), Hurt People-Hack (6), Chatter in an Irritating Fashion-Professional (7), Make Insulting Gesture-Expert (6), Bite Things-Dabbler (5), Dodge-Expert (7), Duck-Expert (7) *Number Appearing*: 1D4+1.

6 Kennel kritters.

Kennel kritters are some of the most disgusting of the CuteDeath creatures. They look like ordinary, droopy dogs, but in fact are blood-starved, ravenous, evil monsters. *STR*: 3 *NIMB*: 2 *AIM*: 2 *SMRT*: 1 *COOL*: 1 *CS*: 2 *LUCK*: 2 *OOPS*: 17 *Skills*: Bite Things-Professional (7), Look Droopy-Expert (4), Growl Menacingly-Hack (3), Dodge-Hack (4), Duck-Expert (5) *Number Appearing*: 1D3-1 (all rolls of 0 are counted as 1).

7 CuteDeath bears.

Roll on the CuteDeath Bears Table.

8 Killer fawns.

These young deer are led by the prince of their race, Bamboo. Embittered when his mother was killed while gnawing on the remains of a hunter, Bamboo became even more vicious than normal for his kind. He and his minions will attempt to lull the patrons into a false sense of security, then kill them. *STR*: 2 *NIMB*: 3 *AIM*: 2 *SMRT*: 2 *COOL*: 4 *CS*: 2 *LUCK*: 1 *OOPS*: 12 *Skills*: Hurt People with Hooves-Expert (5), Bite Things-Professional (6), Look Cute and Innocent-Expert (7), Dodge-Expert (6), Duck-Expert (6) *Number Appearing*: 1D4+2.

9 Stuffed fluffy white baby seals.

These horrifically cute and fuzzy seals are actually vicious man-eaters. They attack by leaping upon prospective victims and chewing on them. They have one special weakness: They take double damage from attacks using blunt objects (blackjacks, saps, clubs, etc.) Their bite does 1D3 Oops! points. *STR*: 1 *NIMB*: 5 *AIM*: 4 *SMRT*: 1 *COOL*: 4 *CS*: 1 *LUCK*: 3 *OOPS*: 7 *Skills*: Jump-Expert (8), Cling to Victim-Professional (5), Bite People-Professional (5), Look Cute and Fuzzy-Expert (7) *Number Appearing*: 2D20.

10 Giant voracious beanbag chairs.

The giant beanbag chairs are huge, all-consuming monstrosities that take on the semblance of incredibly comfy beanbag chairs to lure their prey. They each have a huge, gaping maw full of six-inch teeth. Their bite inflicts 1D6+1 Oops! points damage. *STR*: 6 *NIMB*: 3 *AIM*: 2 *SMRT*: 1 *COOL*: 5 *CS*: 1 *LUCK*: 3 *OOPS*: 20 *Skills*: Bounce Really Fast-Hack (5), Bite Things-Expert (9), Smother-Hack (8), Jump-Dabbler (4), Roll-Expert (6), Look Real Comfy-Professional (9), Dodge-Expert (6), Duck-Expert (6) *Number Appearing*: 1D6 (usually appearing with a minimum of 15 normal beanbag chairs).

11 Plush boa constrictors.

These long, fuzzy constrictor snakes attack by dropping down on people from above and squeezing them for 1D6 Oops! points per round until they are dead. Anyone shooting one of these snakes while it is squeezing someone has a 50% chance of hitting the squeeze (the victim). *STR*: 6 *NIMB*: 3 *AIM*: 4 *SMRT*: 1 *COOL*: 1 *CS*: 1 *LUCK*: 2 *OOPS*: 20 *Skills*: Squeeze Things-Expert (9), Slither Silently-Hack (5), Bite Things-Hack (8), Swallow Large Objects-Professional (10), Death From Above-Expert (7) *Number Appearing*: 1D3.

12 Roll twice on this table.

CUTEDEATH BEARS

Roll Result

1 **Theodore Ruxpin.**
Theodore Ruxpin is a huge teddy bear with 16-inch teeth. He will always follow silently behind the PCs until discovered. Once discovered, he will say something along the lines of, "Hi. My name's Theo Ruxpin. Can we be friends?" or "I'd like to tell you a story." Once he has spoken, he will attempt to rip the PCs to shreds. His bite does 1D6+3 Oops! points. *STR*: 6 *NIMB*: 6 *AIM*: 3 *SMRT*: 3 *COOL*: 4 *CS*: 2 *LUCK*: 2 *OOPS*: 30 *Skills*: Tell Story-Dabbler (5), Bite Things-Expert (9), Hurt People-Professional (10), Dodge-Expert (9), Duck-Expert (9).

2 **Winston the Pooh.**
Winston the Pooh always carries his pot of honey. He will walk straight up to the PC in the lead and say in a zombified sort of voice, "It's lunchtime. Want some honey?" At this point he will open the honey pot, which will disgorge 10 large (six-inch) plush bees. *STR*: 2 *NIMB*: 1 *AIM*: 1 *SMRT*: 1 *COOL*: 1 *CS*: 1 *LUCK*: 6 *OOPS*: 15 *Skills*: Eat Honey-Professional (6), Bite Things-Hack (4), Drink Blood-Expert (5). Winston's bees sting for 1D6+1 Oops! points per sting. Their important stats and skills are: *STR*: 1 *NIMB*: 6 *AIM*: 3 *SMRT*: 1 *COOL*: 1 *CS*: 1 *LUCK*: 2 *OOPS*: 8 *Skills*: Sting People-Hack (8), Fly Real Fast-Expert (9), Dodge-Expert (9), Duck-Expert (9).

3 **Huggles the Fabric Softener Bear.**
Huggles is a truly vicious example of his kind. Approximately three feet tall, he will immediately attack any living PCs in

out and bite his nose for 1D3 Oops! points damage and 1 COOL point for a chomped nose. The door to the north leads to the library. Statistics for the mouse are in the sidebar below.

TALES FROM

Dusty Library: This large room is lined with bookshelves and contains a large fireplace. Three secret doors hidden in this room can be accessed by removing a candle from a sconce, by pushing a statue on the fireplace, or by pulling down the one book with no dust on it (an Easy Notice Detail test), respectively.

Incredibly Long Dining Hall: This room contains an 80-foot-long, highly waxed table. A large feast is laid out on the table (even though no one is there to eat it), and a fire is burning in the long fireplace (even though it's summer). Shields line the walls, and suits of armor stand in the corners. The door to the north leads to the kitchen.

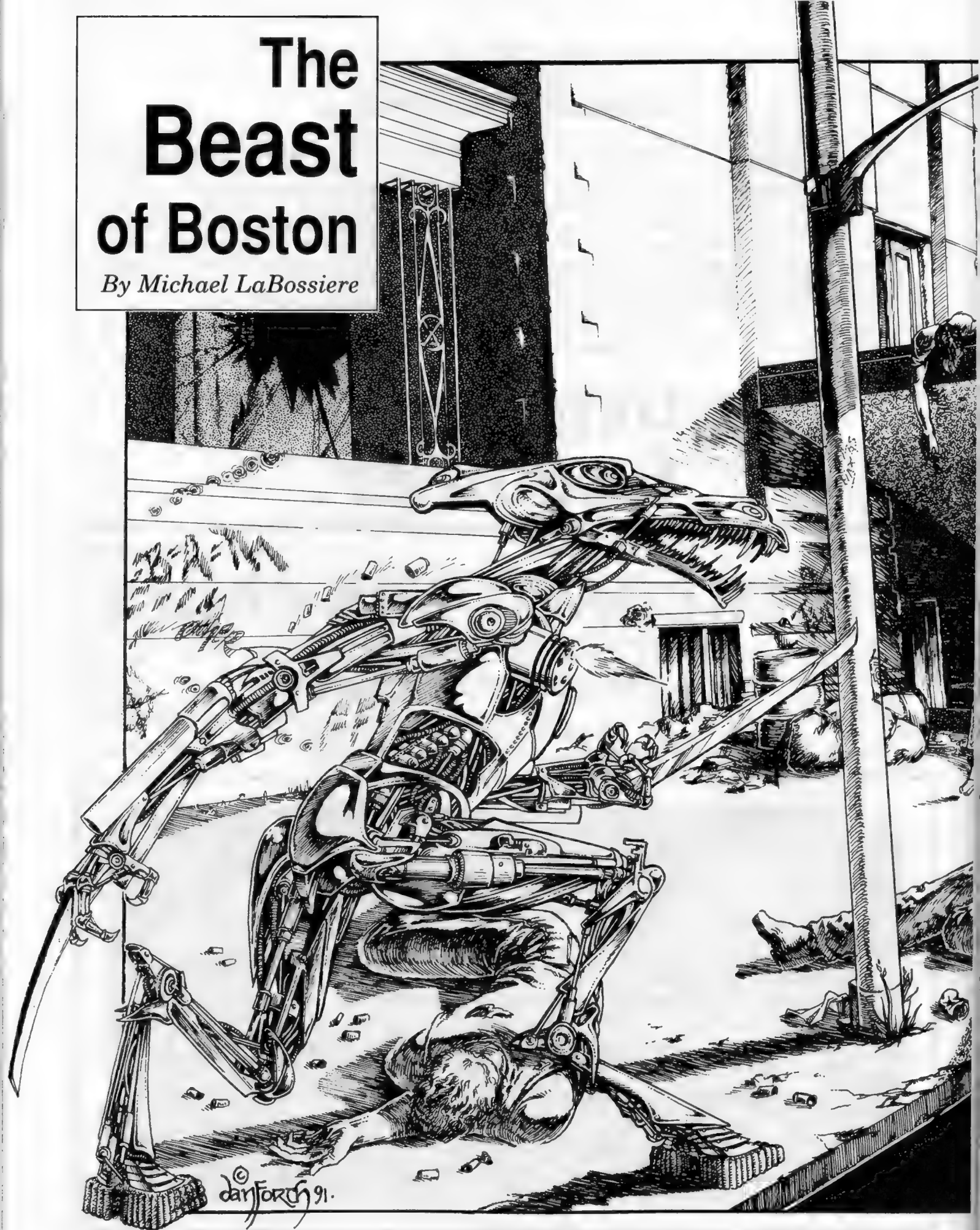
Ridiculously Huge Kitchen: This kitchen is gigantic for no apparent reason. A meal for an army could be prepared here. Lying dead on the floor is a beautiful woman. There is a large refrigerator and some large cupboards here, all full of food.

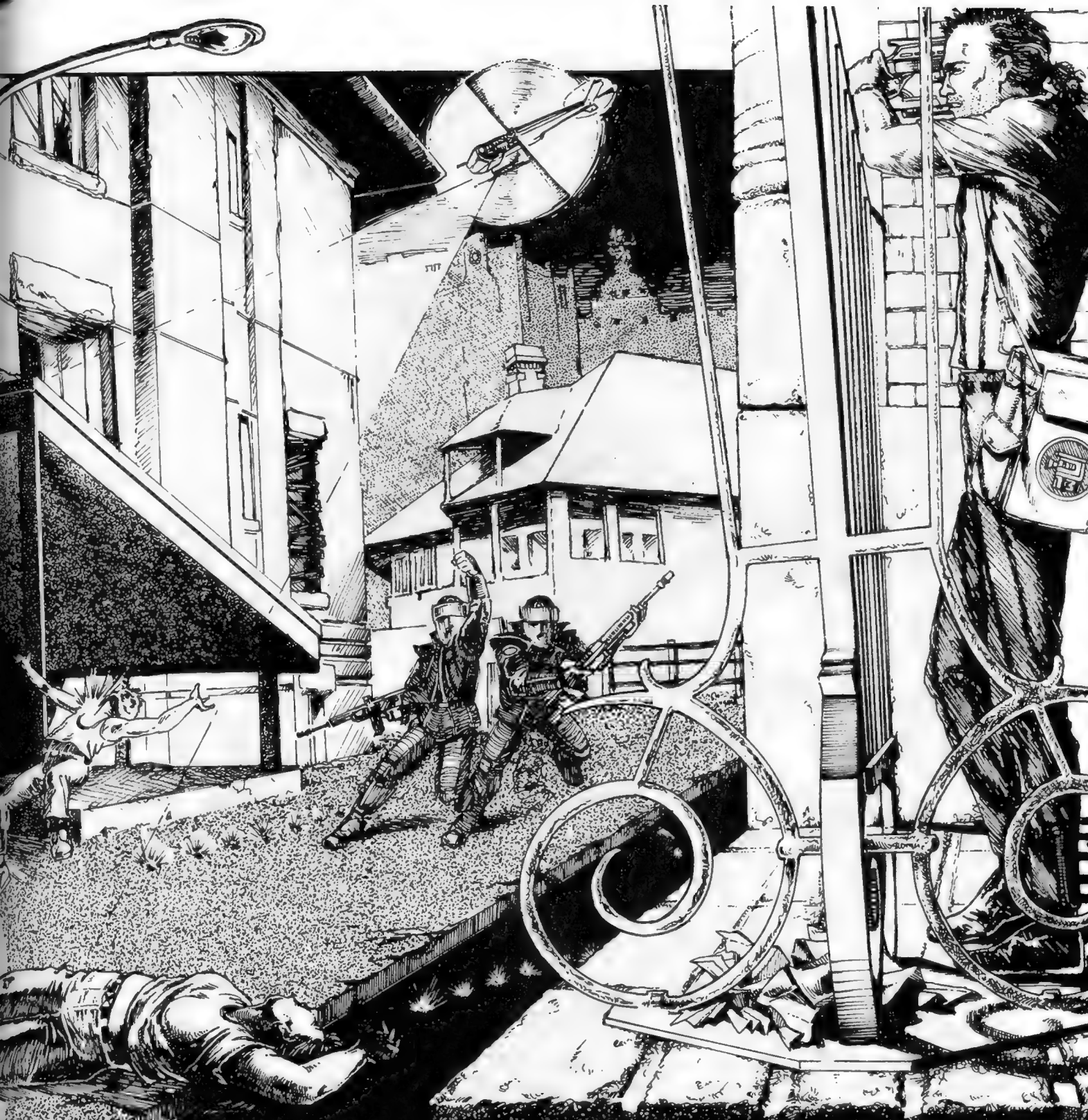
Secret Passage: One direction leads to the gallery peepholes. The other leads to the secret room.

Secret Room: This room is completely dark. As the PCs enter, all that they can see is the evil glint of button eyes in the darkness.

The Beast of Boston

By Michael LaBossiere





A

new type of killer stalks old Boston. Senseless brutality on a nearly unprecedented scale had led the press to name the killer "The Beast of Boston." Police are baffled. The media have no clue. Even the Boostergangs walk in fear. Something must be done, and done soon, before the city drowns in its own blood.

In late October an Adrek hovercraft attempts to deliver a prototype combat cyberform to the Adrek Corporation Technology Research Center (near M.I.T.). Unknown to the crew, the cyberform was fully active and operating with a serious ceretronics dysfunction (it is insane). This dysfunction leads it to kill the crew, ground the hovercraft and head into the city (via a sewer system) to start hunting and killing.

The referee may want to create a generic sewer/drain pipe map, street map, abandoned warehouse map and apartment complex floor map before play begins. This adventure is intended to involve at least one player character team and several NPC teams, with each team including experienced characters. Player characters can all be on the

M-200E Combat Cyberform

The Model 200 Executioner is the latest in the combat cyberform line of the Adrek Corporation. Like other cyberforms, the unit consists of a robotic/cybernetic chassis controlled by a ceretronic system (its organic/electronic "brain"). The M-200E's primary function is execution—the acquisition and destruction of targets.

The unit is a 2.5-meter-tall cyberform which looks like a mechanical cross between an MGM alien and a Tyrannosaurus rex. It is heavily armored, equipped with a variety of projectile and melee weapons. The cyberform has the following stats:

Strength: 16 Ceretronic Rating: 4
Ref: 8 MA: 8
Cool: 10

The ceretronic rating reflects the power and flexibility of the cyberform's intellect. It is roughly equivalent to a human's Intelligence rating. A cyberform can be programmed with a number of skill levels equal to its CRx3. The Strength rating is the same as that used to rate linear frames.

Programmed Skills: (12) Basic functions & programming (required for the unit to operate, counts as two skill levels), Awareness/Notice +1, Melee +2, Submachinegun +3, Heavy Weapons +1.

The cyberform uses the standard hit chart, but takes structural damage like any machine.

Like most cyberforms, the M-200E is equipped with an override system that enables an operator equipped with the proper code to take control of the unit. It is also equipped with an explosive charge under the ceretronics which can be activated with the proper code. These precautions have been taken because the organic components of the ceretronic have been known to destabilize, resulting in serious "accidents." The M-200E in this adventure suffered a dysfunction in its ceretronics prior to being packaged for shipping. This dysfunction resulted in "paranoia," and enabled the unit to disable the control systems and explosive charge, as well as to avoid being shut down for shipment. Thus, the unit had the motivation and the means to escape. The unit should be run like a very cunning paranoid homicidal maniac. Its primary mission is to kill as many people as possible for as long as possible. It will use its capabilities to the fullest.

The various body sections and the effects of damage on them are detailed below.

Head: The head has SP=25 and SPD=35 (useless)/45 (destroyed). Rendering the head useless or destroyed will render the systems in it nonoperational. The unit can function without its head. The head is equipped with four cyberoptics: one on each side, one on the front, and one in the rear. The optics have the following options: image enhancement, target scope, infrared and low lite. The unit is also equipped with an audio-radio system with the following options: amplified hearing, radio link, scrambler, enhanced hearing range, radar detector, tight beam radio link and wide-band radio scanner. The head has functional jaws (with mono-edged teeth) which inflict 2d6 on a successful hit. The teeth are treated as melee weapons. The unit is also equipped with a radar sensor as well as a voice synthesizer (this enables it to talk and mimic sounds it has recorded).

Body: The body has a SP=25 and a SPD=40/55. The body contains the ceretronic system as well as the power supply. The power supply will keep the unit running on full power for 30 days. It can recharge off virtually any heavy power source. Rendering the body useless or destroying it will destroy the cyberform. The body contains a system that functions as a neural processor as well as the equivalent of four interface plugs. Attached to the unit's back are two sensory-extension booms. Each is equipped with a cyberoptic and a microphone. Each cyberoptic has the following options: image enhancement, low lite, teleoptics and targeting scope. If the head is destroyed, the cyberform can rely on its sensory extensions. The body section also contains two AC-12 medium Gatling guns: *Type:* SMG *WA:* +1 *Damage/Ammo:* 4d6+1 (12mm) *#Shots:* 240 *ROF:* 40 *Rel:* VR *Range:* 250 meters. These weapons are considered to be smartchipped. The cyberform can reload its munitions hoppers itself.

Arms: Each of the two arms has SP=25 and SPD=35/45. Each arm is equipped with manipulators that are nearly as agile as a human hand. The arms are very strong and inflict 6d6+8 crushing damage and 1d6+8 punching damage. Extendable blades built into the arms inflict 3d6+8 on a successful attack. For ranged fire, each arm is equipped with a micromissile launcher with an eight-round magazine.

Legs: Each leg has SP=25 and SPD=35/45. The unit's feet are oversized and equipped with a no-skid rubber to ensure stable footing and quiet hunting. While no weapons are built into the legs, each leg has an external weapons mount and link. Each leg also has a motion detector built into it.

same team or on different teams. Having PCs on different teams adds complexity to the adventure but can also add to the fun. The recommended way to handle PCs on different teams is as follows: Each team puts together a schedule and gives it to the referee. This schedule lists where the team intends to go and what it intends to do. This list enables the referee to plan what will be occurring where and who will be involved. Actual play time is divided among the teams as the referee sees fit (fairness is important). It is often a good idea for the teams to "come together" occasionally (such as during the climax of the adventure).

Recommended teams are as follows:

Police: A police team is involved from the beginning, when it is sent to investigate the out-of-control hovercraft. Police teams come from Police Station #574, which is an urban control station (police stationed there deal with large-scale riots, gang wars, cyberpsychos and other unpleasantness). Once the Beast gets into action, the police's goal is to "neutralize" it.

Media: Media teams can range from elite Network 54 teams to local newspaper reporters from small Massachusetts towns. Media teams will be interested in getting the best (bloodiest) footage of the Beast's handiwork, as well as eyewitness reports and so forth. Media teams will not cooperate with rival teams but will cooperate with the police. Given the "media weight" of the Beast, this is a good opportunity for young reporters or small news nets to make a name for themselves. Boston will quickly become a media circus for as long as the TV public is interested in seeing and hearing about the Beast.

Corporation: At least one corporation team will be involved in the adventure. Naturally, Adrek is interested in getting its cyberform back (preferably in one piece and without undue media attention), so an Adrek repo team will be sent to recover it and eliminate any trace of Adrek involvement. If other rival corporations get wind of what is going on, they will send in their own teams. Naturally, the Adrek team will not cooperate with the police, media or other corporate teams.

ACTORS

Cyberform: The cyberform is armed with a Barret-Arasaka light 20mm with seven shots in it. It also has one full clip (10 shots). The cyberform's goal is escape at this point.

Adrek Team 1: This four-person team will arrive via helicopter and try to gain control of the cyberform via a control code. When this fails, the team members will try to disable the cyberform. They have strict orders to keep the media from filming the cyberform and to keep the police from destroying it. They also have orders to destroy the hover-

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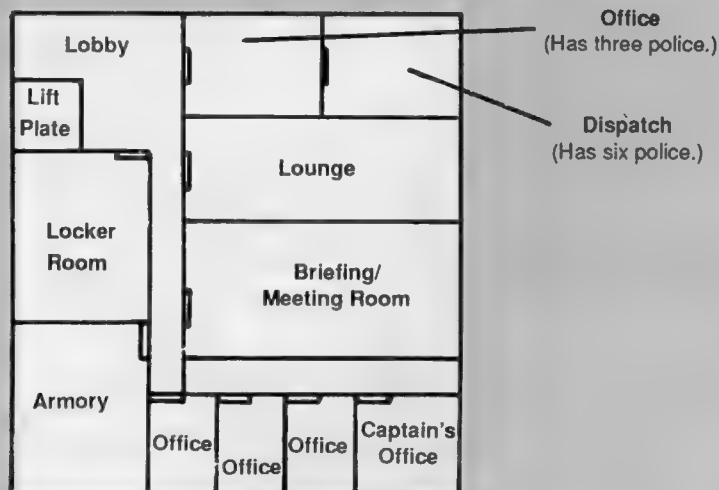
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A Renaissance in Games

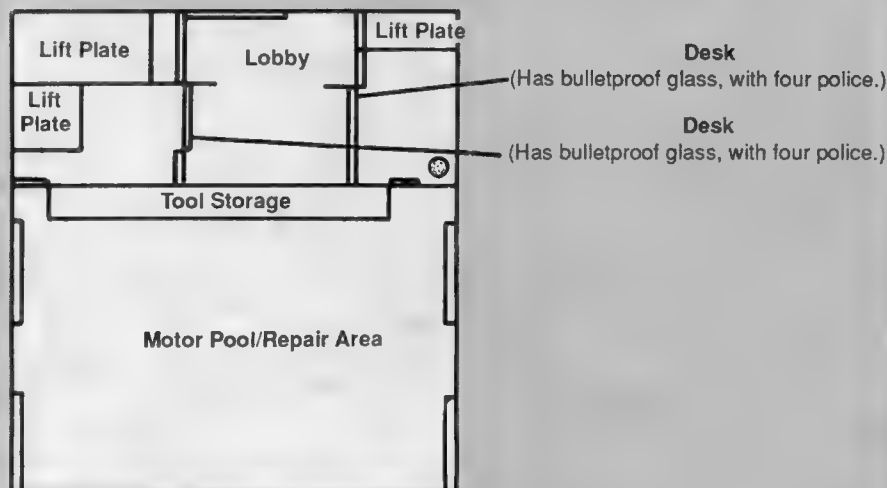
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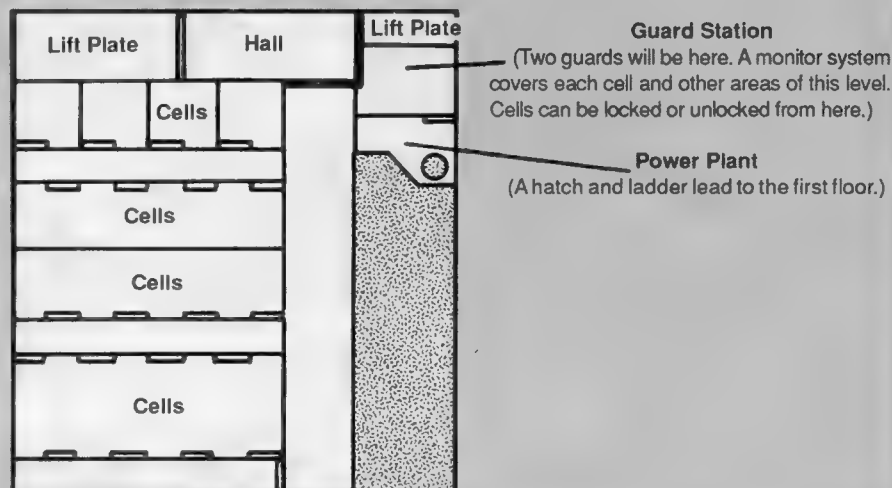
Police Station 574 Boston Sector



Second Floor



First Floor



Ground Floor

craft to prevent Adrek involvement from becoming public—because of laws governing the transport of robotic weapon systems through or into urban zones, as well as laws regarding ceretronic technology.

Adrek Team 2: The second team is the backup. It has the same orders as the first team. Any Adrek PCs will be on this team.

Police: Two police cruisers will arrive on the scene, each with two officers. One car should contain only NPCs (have the Beast blow this one up for dramatic effect). Any PC police should be in the second car.

Media: Media teams will arrive by AV, helicopter or van. They will try to find out what is occurring and will tend to get in the way of the Adrek teams and the police. For dramatic effect, the Beast could shoot down a media helicopter or two.

Cyberforms: Four cyberform B centipedes are active in the hovercraft. They have been programmed by the M-200E to attack any human.

SP: 10 **SDP:** 6 **Ref:** 9 **Attack:** +4 **Athletics:** +6 **Dart Gun:** Hammer M-11 bolt pistol **Mandibles:** Knife (see **Challenge 43**, page 57).

INFORMATION

Teams will receive information from a variety of sources. If desired, PC media teams can write news stories/TV reports to be given to other teams. Naturally, at the start of the situation, almost everyone is more or less in the dark. Each team's initial briefing is as follows:

Police Briefing

Date: October (fill in campaign date), 2020

Time: 2:00 a.m.

Station: #574

Situation: A corporation hovercraft transport has been sighted by a Boston Police patrol craft heading inland, apparently out of control. The hovercraft reports sustaining fire from a 20mm cannon. The craft will beach at coordinates 54-73 on grid map 12 if it maintains current course.

Orders: Two patrol cars are to proceed to coordinates 54-73 GM12 and assist patrol officers. Occupant or occupants of hovercraft are heavily armed and should be considered hostile.

Media Briefing

Date: October (fill in campaign date), 2020

Time: 1:55 a.m.

Information: Police band scanners picked up an engagement between a Boston patrol craft and a hover transport in Boston Harbor at 1:52 a.m.

Assignment: An airmobile media team is to be dispatched to the scene to determine what is occurring.

Adrek Corporation Briefing

Date: October (fill in campaign date), 2020

Time: 2:00 a.m.

Situation: At 1:47 a.m. contact was lost with transport craft #422. At 1:50 a.m. a report was picked up on police bands indicating that the hovercraft was moving erratically. At 1:52 a.m. the hovercraft is reported to have fired on the police craft.

Orders: A repo team is to be selected and airlifted to the scene in order to take control of the hovercraft. The police are not to be allowed to interfere.

ON THE BEACH

Slightly after 2 a.m. the hovercraft will approach the beach, swinging wildly out of control. Behind it can be seen a Boston patrol craft. Weapons flash between the two vessels. Eventually, the hovercraft crashes into the remnants of a pier and grinds to a halt on the beach. As the patrol boat closes in, a flash of light is visible as a Scorpion 16 missile plows into the patrol craft, taking it out of action with a rather impressive fireball.

At this point, the PCs get involved. The police teams will arrive from between the buildings. Media teams on the ground will arrive the same way. Airborne media teams will come off the ocean. The first Adrek team will fly in from over the city and will be the first on the scene, followed by airborne media and police (five minutes latter), and ground media (five minutes after the air media). The second Adrek team (any Adrek PCs will be on this team) will arrive two minutes after the police and will enter from over the city.

When the hovercraft lands, the cyberform will move from the hovercraft and run toward the drain pipes, pausing only to kill what gets in its way. The first Adrek team will attempt to stop it and a firefight will ensue. This should last until the first police or media team arrives. The Adrek team will attempt to keep the media away (shooting if necessary) and will try to avoid the police. Once the media and police get on the scene, two of the Adrek team members will head toward the hovercraft to set incendiary and explosive charges.

The action will continue until the situation is resolved. The cyberform will flee into the sewers, kill a few more NPCs and escape. It is a good idea to keep the PCs from getting a clear look at the cyberform—it's best that they don't know exactly what it is they are after.

Hovercraft: The hovercraft has been driven up onto the remains of a pier and has had its ground-effect skirt torn up. Dim red light spills from its ports. There are several shot out windows and bullet holes through the hull. A missile launch tube (empty) lies on the deck.

The hovercraft includes the following (see diagram):

- **Cargo Bay:** The cargo bay contains a transport crate labeled M-200E, which is painted with the Adrek Corporation markings. The crate has been smashed open from the inside. Several other crates are scattered around, all torn open and with their contents strewn about.

- **Engineering:** This area allows access to the engines and contains a hatch and a ladder to the top deck. The ladder rungs are bent down, and there is a gaping hole where



the deck around the hatch was sliced out from below.

- **Bridge:** The door has been forced open

Bell Combat Helicopter

The Bell is a conventional armored helicopter equipped with low lite and infrared viewers, as well as a chin mount for light weapons (miniguns or grenade launchers). Rocket pods can be attached to the sides, as can heavier machineguns. The vehicle has SP=20 and SDP=65 and can carry up to four people.

Airspeed is 300 mph.

The base cost is 185,000eb, weapons extra.

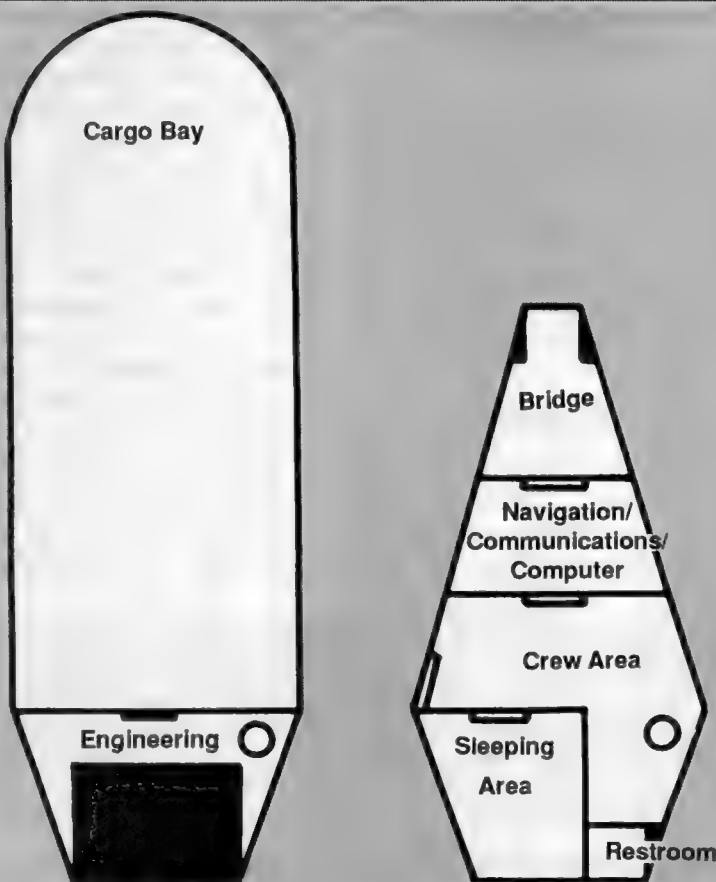
Urban Patrol Vehicle

Designed to replace the conventional patrol car, this vehicle incorporates the latest in armor weaponry. The UPV has a front section for the driver and passenger and a heavy-duty rear section to carry unruly prisoners.

The vehicle is very tough (SP=30 and SDP=100) and is equipped with IR and low lite systems, multiband wide- and tight-beam radio, as well as a weapons turret.

The top speed of the wheeled UPV is 110 mph.

Base price is 65,000eb without weapons. Typical weapons include grenade launchers and heavy submachineguns.



Hovercraft

from the outside with great force. Two bodies lie scattered about the cabin (they have been sliced into pieces). The floor and windows are drenched with blood (hence the red light). An Armalite .44 lies on the deck, along with four flattened slugs. The hand of its owner still grips it.

- **Navigation/Communications/Computer:** This room contains the ship's electronics systems. A man's body is smashed into a computer terminal, and blood drips from it onto the deck.

- **Crew Area:** This area contains the galley, as well as tables and chairs. The room is empty.

- **Sleeping Area:** This area contains bunks and lockers. A body is in one locker (it has been carved to fit). For a cheap and clichéd effect, have the body fall on someone.

Beach Geography: The referee can create a map of the beach, including the following features:

- **Buildings:** Buildings along the beach are old warehouses, most of which are abandoned and unsafe. The area between the buildings is unlit, littered and rather slimy.

- **Fence:** A rusty wire fence strung between rusty metal poles runs between the buildings and the beach. It would be rather unpleasant to run into in the dark.

- **Beach:** The sand and rocks are littered with a variety of unpleasant material: dead fish, rotting seaweed, medical waste and worse. The area smells rather bad, and the ocean seems offended at having to lap such shores.

- **Drain Pipes:** From these three pipes spill a noxious brew of wastes, which run down the beach into the ocean. Bulky filter systems are set up in the front of the pipes, but these have been stripped, shot up and set on fire by local gangs.

- **Docks:** Three docks grow like rotted teeth from the mouth of the beach. They are unsafe, with many jagged holes and collapsed sections.

ON THE PROWL

Eventually, the cyberform will vanish into the maze that is the Boston area sewer system. The events on the coast will be in the news—the details will depend on what happened on the beach. There will be a

police investigation, but little will be found. Only Adrek Corporation will have an idea as to what exactly happened, and it will send in the survivors from teams 1 and 2 to look for the cyberform.

The cyberform will remain hidden in the sewers for a week. During this time, it is a good idea for the PC teams to participate in a short adventure or two. The Adrek PC team can comb the sewers and look for clues.

At the end of the week, the cyberform will start hunting.

KILLS

The cyberform will be responsible for 2-7 incidents per night.

Use the Nightly Incidents Table below to generate police and media reports. Roll 1D6+6 to see how many incidents occur, then roll for each on the table to determine their nature.

Media reports of the Beast's activities will drive a dagger of fear into the public consciousness. People will be more heavily armed and paranoid than before. And copy-cat killers may lead the PCs off the trail. A cyberpsycho copy-cat would be particularly interesting.

MEETING THE BEAST

At some point the PCs should catch up with the Beast. This encounter may be the result of careful planning and tracking on the PCs' part or may be a matter of chance. Two plausible areas in which to meet the Beast are the street and an apartment.

Eventually, the cyberform will acquire enough data to recognize those pursuing it and will set out to track them down. Since the two greatest threats against it are the police and the Adrek team, one of them may be attacked first. The cyberform may attack characters at home or on the street.

Street: The Beast will be attacking a small group of people in a darkened section of the street (due to constant vandalism, most streets are dark). The few working lights will be reflected in the pools of blood, and the streets will be filled with mutilated bodies and burning cars. Panicked people will be running and screaming. The Beast will at-

tack anything that approaches it and will only leave when the situation gets too hot. Then it will head into the sewers.

The referee may use the generic street map mentioned in the introduction for these encounters.

Apartment Building: The Beast likes apartment complexes because of the large number of people crammed into a small area. It tends to move from room to room, smashing through doors and walls. The Beast often sets buildings on fire during its attack (it doesn't need much air and is virtually immune to fire), and tends to get "kill crazy" in apartments, which might cause it to remain on the scene long enough for the PCs to arrive. Nonetheless, the Beast should escape this encounter when the situation becomes dangerous.

The referee may use the generic apartment complex floor map mentioned in the introduction for these encounters.

Adrek Team Base: The Adrek team base is located in an abandoned warehouse near the area where the cyberform originally comes to ground. The cyberform will attack by smashing through a wall or the front door. If the Adrek team is all NPCs, the cyberform attack can be resolved by the referee.

A small office located in one corner of the warehouse was long ago stripped and has been turned into the team's operation center. It will be equipped as the PCs' desire (or if the team is all NPCs, it will have various communication tracking gear). A lounge in another corner of the warehouse has been fixed up and equipped with cots and cooking gear. The largest part of the warehouse is the storage area, which has a few busted crates, some rats and plenty of dust.

The referee may use the generic abandoned warehouse map mentioned in the introduction for these encounters.

Police Station 574: The police station is a forboding concrete bunker set off a city street. Around the back is a walled parking lot for the police vehicles and the officers' cars. The cyberform will attack through the front doors.

See the police station map for details.

ENDING THE ADVENTURE

The cyberform will continue to hunt the PCs once it recognizes them until they are killed, it is destroyed, or they leave Boston. It will continue to kill until it is stopped.

Needless to say, Adrek will not want anyone to know of Adrek's connection to the Beast. Therefore, Adrek might have to deal with certain people once the Beast is dealt with. This "dealing" can range from a death to a bribe.

Media or police PCs may wish to follow up this adventure with an investigation of Adrek (which has a closet full of skeletons). **Ω**

Nightly Incidents

Roll	Description	Number Killed
1-3	Random cyberform attack on the street	1-10
4-5	Cyberform breaks into an apartment building	3-30
6	Cyberform attacks police patrol or media teams	1-6
7-8	Cyberform enters an open business or factory	3-30
9	Cyberform enters a closed business or factory	1-6
0	Cyberform is involved in a gang battle	3-30

Galaxy Guide 6: Tramp Freighters review by Craig Sheeley. *Age of Ruin* review by Eric W. Haddock.

Galaxy Guide 6: Tramp Freighters

West End Games. \$13 (US).

Designers: Mark Rein-Hagen and Stuart Wieck.

80-page *Star Wars* game supplement.

Ah, the life of a free trader—free to go wherever he wishes, free of freight-line rules and regulations, free to be his own man (or alien), free to choose his own destiny. And free to strike it rich or plunge deep into debt, depending on one's luck and savvy, while fighting to win a living from a cutthroat free-market system where nothing really comes free.

Tramp Freighters introduces a new and much-needed wrinkle to the *Star Wars* game: roleplaying that doesn't have to involve the

dangerous and often sickeningly noble business of being a part of the Rebellion (at least not consciously).

The supplement contains most of the rules which are necessary to run a trading campaign, including the details of making money—speculative trading, hired runs, the black market—and of losing money to port fees, maintenance, bribes and loan sharks. It also contains a lengthy section on any spaceship owner's favorite subject: repairs and improvements (adding faster engines, stronger shields, bigger guns, and all the little gadgets that can make ships fun to own).

Finally, the supplement features an entire sector (the Minos Cluster) story outlines for a campaign spanning the whole cluster, and detailed nonplayer characters to enliven the campaign.

Tramp Freighters has to be one of the best supplements ever made for the *Star Wars* game. Over half of its contents are

game material, usable in almost any *Star Wars* campaign. The illustrations are at least as good as any other game company's illustrations, and better than most—finally we get to see what the dreaded Imperial customs frigate (the bane of every Rebel adventurer) looks like. The writing is concise, with plenty of examples, a welcome break from the wordy essays of the Imperial and Rebel sourcebooks. And the campaign is playable, with plenty of room for the gamemaster to interject his own material in between the "plot" adventures. This supplement was written by gamers, not academics.

GOOD STUFF

Several sections of the supplement need special note. The trading section is simple and easy to use. Although the instructions are a bit hazy at first, the examples illustrate the processes and explain the instructions. I found the difficulty of making real money to be a welcome relief from the old speculative

THE DYNASTY

Craft: The Dynasty

Captain: Axtor Bridgeman

Type: Modified Stock Light Freighter

Crew: 2

Passengers: 4

Cargo Capacity: 100 metric tons, 40 cubic meters

Consumables: 2 months

Hyperdrive Multiplier: x2

Nav Computer: Yes

Hyperdrive Backup: Yes

Sublight Speed: 2D

Maneuverability: 1D

Hull: 4D

Weapons:

One Laser Cannon

Fire Control: 2D

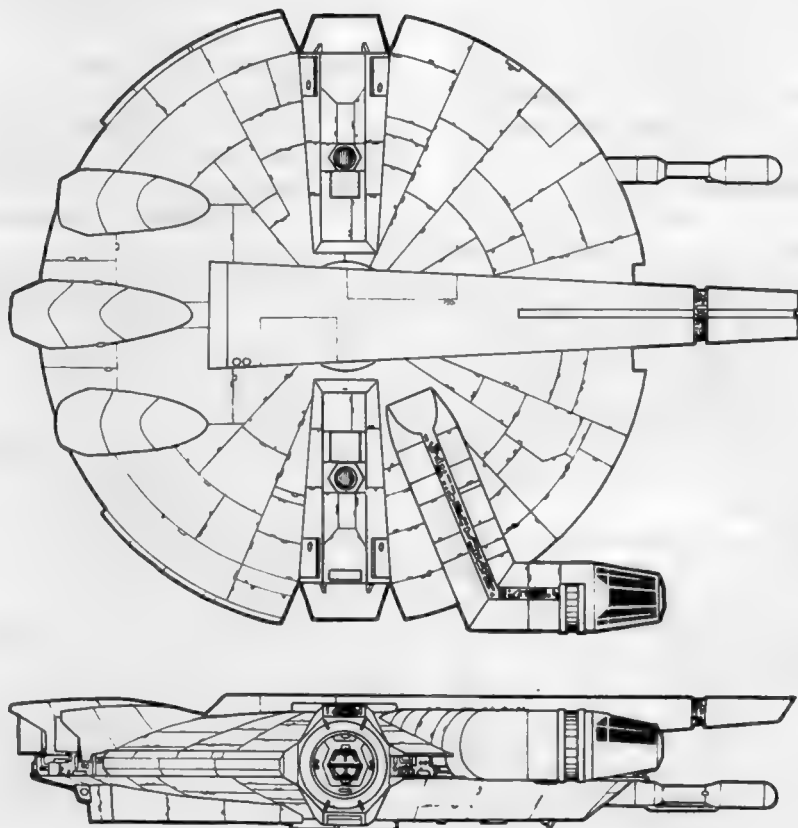
Damage: 2D

Two Concussion Missile Tubes

Fire Control: 1D

Damage: 8D

Shields: 2D



trading rules in *Traveller*, where it was possible to make a killing with minimal effort—too many millionaires running around for comfort. After all, adventurers are supposed to struggle for their rewards, aren't they? It's still possible to make a small fortune in *Tramp Freighters*, but there are also many ways for the gamemaster to drain that fortune.

The authors were devilishly correct when they described the black market as a gamemaster's paradise. "Every gamemaster dreams of getting his characters enmeshed in the black market. It's a place where you can offer them huge rewards in return for hideous risks, and watch their greed battle their common sense. Guess which one wins more often?" The black market is the perfect "hook" for a game, particularly if the characters are desperate for cash and can't afford to be careful.

Chapter eight covers ship repairs and modifications. These rules are much better for game flow than the rules on ship modification presented in *Star Wars*. Rather than paying for ship upgrades with skill points, characters pay for new gadgets with cold, hard credits. In addition, new equipment takes up cargo space, which is detrimental to a freighter's function—a ship souped-up to the max won't be able to carry enough cargo to pay its upkeep. Still, most of the new material is interesting and needed: faster ion engines and hyperdrives, larger weapons, better maneuverability, superior sensors, new internal modifications such as environment control, secret compartments, tractor beams, fuel converters, and much more.

And they all cost—the better the equipment, the higher the price tag.

Of course, the gamemaster doesn't have to stick rigidly to these rules. Use of skill points (and lots of rare spare parts) should still be allowed to make unorthodox adjustments and improvements that go beyond the limits of these rules. (Han Solo: "I've made a lot of special modifications myself.") Of course, these modifications might not work as well as the tried and tested commercial designs.

And where are the characters going to get all the money they need to finance these upgrades? Why, from their friendly loan shark, a generous and trusting soul. Someone like Jabba the Hutt. Someone who charges ridiculous interest rates (10% of the loan per month for 30 months) and employs understanding and patient beings as collection executives—like Boba Fett and his ilk. The rules for loan shark involvement provide yet another adventure hook for manipulating the characters (in *Traveller*, this would be a "push").

The Minos Cluster campaign allows the characters to choose if they want to become

part of the Rebellion on a sector where the Rebellion hardly notes Imperial attention. For a change, the adventurers may enter the Rebellion willingly, as they innocently run afoul of Rebel plans (free traders are favorite carriers for the Rebellion since they are usually willing to go to remote locations and don't ask too many questions about the cargo). It's a decent, playable campaign—and more flexible than the average *Star Wars* campaign.

DARK SIDE

To paraphrase an old saying, every silver lining has a dark cloud in front of it. Even a sterling supplement like this one has some bad spots.

For instance, as good as the ship repair and modification section is, it's still limited—I would've been happier with more rules on special modifications and the starfighter modification rules promised for another supplement.

But my biggest problem with this supplement is its price. Thirteen bucks for an adventure-sized book with a color cover and no maps is a bit steep—West End Games could have had the authors add more detail and rules, bumped the book size to 120 pages, and charged \$15-16 for it.

After all, the *Star Wars* sourcebooks are hardbound, 144-page monsters, and they retail for only \$20—which is only half again as much.

IN CONCLUSION

Tramp Freighters is good. Two thumbs up. It joins *Star Wars*, the *Star Wars Sourcebook* and the *Gamemaster's Pack* as the must-buy items for the *Star Wars* game. It's pricey, but that's the only major flaw.

I congratulate West End Games for putting this supplement out, and carefully note that it took a pair of free-lance authors to do a *Star Wars* supplement right. Mark and Stuart, do it again! Please write more *Star Wars* supplements.

Age of Ruin

Cutting Edge Games. \$17.95.

Design: Clay Gibson, chief designer. 160-page perfect-bound book.

Age of Ruin is a postholocaust roleplaying game set on future Earth. The world situation wasn't caused by a nuclear war, but by a combination of a severe greenhouse effect and a plague that killed 80% of the world's population and caused nearly everyone to mutate.

The characters are born into this world (most likely with some sort of genetic mutation), having no memory of what the 1990s were like. Adventures revolve around survival in the ravaged world.

RULES

Age of Ruin's rules are very easy to grasp, and there is usually an explanation for everything. The novice player should have no trouble picking up this game and playing it after reading the rules (which are well written and have few inconsistencies).

COMBAT

Combat is extremely simple, and the combat rules (including optional rules) are only eight pages long. Each character has a Missile Attack Value (Missile AV) and Melee Attack Value (Melee AV).

For example, a character hitting with a club rolls under his Melee AV (a percentage number) to hit. If the character is successful, the target rolls under his Defense Value (DV), which is also a percentage number. If the target rolls under his DV, then the attack does no damage; otherwise, it hits and does damage.

An optional rule details armor taking damage instead of the character; otherwise, armor is figured into the target's DV.

Attributes affect combat values. The higher the Dexterity, the greater the bonus.

The two hit locations are high and low. High hit location represents hits taken to the upper body and arms; lower hit location is to the lower body and legs. In addition to hitting targets, characters can have critical hits and misses, can attempt to hit a particular body location and can take aimed shots.

Combat is organized into rounds—the players all act on the same round and NPCs act on another round. Multiple attacks can exist in the same round, dependent on the weapon used in the attack. For instance, a character can make one melee attack per round, but can make five attacks a round with an automatic rifle.

Players who want ultra-realism in their combat will not like *Age of Ruin's* combat system. It's made to be quick and simple, and it succeeds in that. Some minor questions arise that aren't covered in the rules, and some things aren't totally realistic, but a strong cinematic flavor is maintained, which is a merit. The inclusion of two hit locations, upper and lower body, and their very easy determination yields a visual aspect and (albeit a low degree of) realism to combat without any amount of additional complication or time.

Combat is also chartless, meaning that unless the character rolls a critical success or failure, there are no charts to look up during play. This is always a benefit for roleplaying games, in my opinion, and one that every game should strive for.

CHARACTER GENERATION

Character generation is organized into nine steps in *Age of Ruin*. Players generate

their characters' attributes using point generation. This means that every character has a total of 425 points to allocate among eight attributes: Charisma, Dexterity, Endurance, Intelligence, Luck, Mind Strength, Quickness and Strength.

Players can also choose to alter their characters by giving them a genetic mutation that yields some sort of benefit. But with every beneficial mutation, there is a "drawback" to contend with. For example, if a player picks Enhanced Smell mutation, the benefit is a sense of smell good enough to track people by scent. The drawback is that they are twice as susceptible to nasal attacks, such as tear gas. Severe mutations include extra limbs, prehensile tails, gills, spiky arms, third eyes, body fur and others—each with a related drawback.

After mutations are chosen, all characters with a high enough Mind Strength attribute can select one or more psionic ability, which are mental powers the character can use. As with mutations, every psionic power picked means the player has to roll on the Mental Maladies Table to see what the drawback of having the psionic power is. These maladies are some sort of mania or phobia. How these phobias and manias are played is up to the player and the referee, but none of the mental maladies are so inhibiting as to make a character unplayable.

The character sheet is visually poor and slightly flawed (it could use a few blank lines under a couple of headings), but it serves the purpose.

SKILLS

Every character chooses eight Primary skills and five Secondary skills, and proficiency is rated as a percentage. If the char-

acter has a high enough Intelligence, one or more advanced skills can be taken. Players choose whether their character comes from a primitive background or a technological background, and each background has its own skill list to choose from.

Although this makes skill selection very easy, it can create a problem. There are only 16 primary skills to choose from in the technological background, so every technologically backgrounded character gets half of the primary skills available. Therefore, duplication of skills among a party is extremely easy. In addition, everyone starts out at "beginner level" in the skills, so, barring adjustment by attributes, everyone's proficiency with a skill is the same. This can be rather bland to start out with, but role-playing, mutations (especially) and psionics will most likely draw the lines and start defining characters.

APPEARANCE

This game easily ranks as the worst in appearance of those I've seen. The cover picture is atrocious and the choice of colors yields a garish, unprofessional presentation. The interior is better, though only in some places.

Perhaps the worst interior sections are the technical illustrations of weapons and grenades. The technical illustrations were apparently done by a variety of artists, and the different styles give the whole section an uneven, inconsistent look.

The text is laid out in a visually uninspired manner, but it isn't bad. Headings and important paragraphs are easy to find (better than in some games I've seen), and your eyes will flow across the pages easily. All in all, a good text presentation.

EVALUATION

The cover and inside art gave me a very poor first impression. Had I seen this on the shelf and opened it up to look at it, I would have put it down and not gone back to it because of the art.

However, the more I read the text, the more I began to enjoy the game. The combat system is quick and easy, as are skills, psionics and character generation.

For players and referees who already have a clear idea of what their postholocaust game will be like, *Age of Ruin* provides about everything they need.

Novice players will like the *Age of Ruin* rules. Novice referees, though, will be probably left out in the cold after one or two sessions after the introductory adventure since *Age of Ruin* is a little short on source material. But since the book is 160 pages long, contains an introductory adventure and is a complete roleplaying game (including vehicle combat rules), this is quite understandable. And, even with this shortage, the referee has enough to run a few sessions before having to make up monsters, other cults and other challenges. The introductory adventure suggests that the town included serve as a base for further adventuring by the players, so there's plenty to start on.

All and all, I would recommend this game. If you see it on the shelf, try to look past the art and review it as a fun, easy, postholocaust-genre game you can play the same day you get it. Ω

Cutting Edge Games, publisher of Age of Ruin, has put together a campaign setting for Age of Ruin called Realm of the Beast. This product will be reviewed in a future issue of Challenge.

GDW Product Distribution

GDW products (including *Traveller*) are available through distributors as follows:

● **Australia:** Imported and distributed by *Jedko Games*, 134 Cochranes Rd., Moorabbin, Vic, 3198, Australia.

● **Finland:** Imported and distributed by *Fantasiapeli Tudeer KY*, P Rastitie 6 B 22, 01360 Vantaa, Finland.

Some titles are translated into Finnish.

● **France:** Imported and distributed by *Jeux Actuels*, BP534, 270005 Evreux Cedex, France.

● **Italy:** Imported and distributed by *Books and Games* via R. di Lauria 15, 20149 Milano, Italy. Some titles are translated into Italian.

● **Japan:** Printed and distributed by *Post Hobby Japan Co., Ltd.*, 26-5, 5-chome, Sendagaya, Shibuyaku, Tokyo, Japan. Titles published are translated into Japanese.

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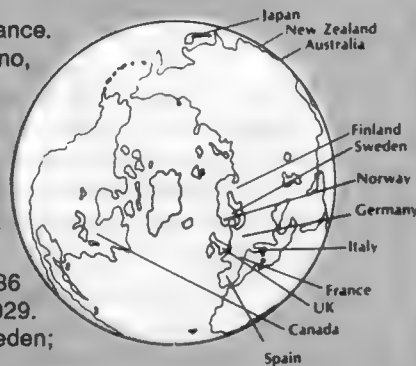
● **Portugal:** *Frente Cooperativa Editorial*, Praca Duque de Saldanha 20, RC/D, 1000 Lisboa, Portugal.

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HIWG (Australia and New Zealand) is looking for **MegaTraveller**

players and referees down under who are interested in discussing the future of the Imperium and contributing to its development. For information write to David Schneider, 5 East Ave., Allenby Gardens, South Australia 5009 AUSTRALIA. (52)

SPIRITED GAMERS WANTED—players of *Star Wars*, **Merc: 2000**, and most other SF games in San Antonio, TX area. Contact Clint Williamson, 11845 West Ave. #411, San Antonio, TX 78216-2536. (51)

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BATTLETECH/Star Cruiser players in the Visalia/Fresno area. Will exchange designs or play by mail. Write to Patrick Drew, 40583 Road 80, Dinuba, CA 93618. (51)

SPACE: 1889 enthusiasts—I would like to correspond with anyone wishing to exchange ideas, adventures and variant rules. Submissions for a **Space: 1889** newsletter would also be welcomed. Write to Stephen A. Connor, 534 Caroline St., Windsor, Ontario, CANADA N9A 6A8. (51)

BATTLETECH play-by-mailers: Since the disbandment of the 472nd Swordsmen, Captain Equinox and his 'Mech company are looking for employment. Anyone with an established PBM please contact Jim Domarad, 3730 S. Mill, Greenbriar Apt. J104, Tempe, AZ 85282-4906. (51)

NEED CHICAGO southside players for ICE, Mayfair, FASA, Palladium, and other roleplaying games. Contact Terry at 434 W. 97th St., Chicago, IL 60628. (50)

EXPERIENCED GM and players for **MegaTraveller** in Las Vegas area. Contact Robert Fain, 4550 W. Sahara #2139, Las Vegas, NV 89102. (50)

JOIN THE ETHER NET—the organization for **Space: 1889** gamers. Play-by-mail, solitaire, and double-play adventures, gaming hints, resource library, new inventions, and the latest **1889** news. Enclose a SASE for the cost of membership. The Ether Net, 1340B Commerce St., Grenada, MS 38901. (50)

PLAYTESTERS NEEDED for play-by-mail one-on-one wargame. Tactical level—players control individual troopers and tanks. Medium-high tech, near-future setting: laser rifles, powered armor, smart artillery rounds, etc. For a detailed game description, send a SASE to Solaris Gaming, 446 Wallen Hills Drive #8,

Fort Wayne, IN 46825. (50)

MEGATRAVELLER PLAYERS wanted—Chicago area. We're looking for two or three adult (age 18+) players to join an existing **MegaTraveller** campaign set in the Shattered Imperium, Antares sector. Referee is a professional game designer and the campaign stresses roleplaying, not roll playing. No **MegaTraveller** experience necessary—just the desire to play the granddaddy of SF RPGs. We'll probably be playing at Games Plus in Mt. Prospect, IL, most likely on Wednesday nights starting very, very soon. If you're interested, please call Phil at (708) 303-6402. (50)

GALACTIC ANARCHY is a PBM game of exploration and conquest, set after a protracted civil war. Two to 30 players vie for control of the universe. There can be up to 70 artifacts, 700 systems and 1000 fleets in one game. Write to Anarchy By Mail, PO Box 873, Allen, TX 75002. (50)

SONS AND DAUGHTERS of the Empire! Your queen is most gratified at the response to her call for volunteers to rescue Dr. O'Donnahue and his sister. Those wishing to join may still do so by sending a character sheet along with a bio of their character to Countdown to Armageddon, c/o D. E. Brynelsen, 21W127 Tee Lane #3, Itasca, IL 60143. Please enclose a SASE for return of turns. (49)

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SOURCEBOOKS and supplements for *Twilight: 2000*. Also *Challenge* magazines (issues 25 to present). For use with *Mega-Traveller/Traveller*. *Dragon* magazine issue 59 (March '82)—features subclass of scout profession, "Skitterbugging and the Exonidas Spaceport," over 21 pages of information. Write to Darren Skomoroh, 44 Walden Crescent, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2C 0N4, CANADA. No SASE necessary. (52)

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ALL TWILIGHT: 2000 articles from the following issues of *Challenge*: 25, 26, 27, 30, 31 and 36. Am willing to pay all copy and postage costs. Contact Donald K. Doll, 830 S. Wenonah Ave., Oak Park, IL 60304-1036. (52)

ORIGINALS/PHOTOCOPIES of *Stardate* or *Stardrive* magazine. Price negotiable. Also need FASA's *Triangle* supplement. Contact Cary Layton, PO Box 416, Cape Girardeau, MO 63701. (52)

IDEAS for computer programs to aid in playing and refereeing *MegaTraveller* game system. Programs will be PC compatible. Other game systems will be considered. Also want any available PC-compatible *MegaTraveller* programs (buy or trade). Programs will eventually be for sale, but the person who had the inspiration will receive a free copy of the completed program and credit in the documentation. Write to Russell Wetherington, 2611 Forbes St., Jacksonville, FL 32204. (52)

ANY ROBOTECH RPGs, preferably book one, *Macross*, but any will do. Contact Matt Schafer, 1796 Barker St. NE, Palm Bay, FL 32907. (52)

SECURITY LEAK magazine, Third Imperium. Originals or photocopies. Richard Artis, 151 G Meadow Place, Hope, IN 47246. (52)

ORIGINAL TRAVELLER material. Need rule books (#4 and up), supplements (#12+), *Adventures* (#9+), *Challenge* (#26, 29-35, 37-47), *Traveller's Digest* (any), *Grand Survey* (or *Robots*, *Action Aboard*, *Rescue on Galatea*, *Fate of the Sky Raiders*, *The Harreusa Project*). Photocopies okay. Send list, prices, conditions to Ken Bartold, 26939 Sheahan, Dearborn Heights, MI 48127. (52)

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INQUISITOR—*Warhammer 40K* newsletter/forum for experienced players. EQ./vehicle design, open forum, scenarios, question and answer, army calculation worksheets, unit stat cards and more. *Inquisitor*, PO Box 14485, Santa Rosa, CA 95402-6485. (52)

SPINWARD TIMES—a new fanzine dealing with the merchant and economics in *MegaTraveller*. Also included are adventures, medical data, news and equipment. *Spinward Times*, c/o AG Games, 823 Ponsard St., Brossard, Quebec, CANADA J4W 1W1. (51)

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STARSHIPS, STARPORTS AND VEHICLES issues are available. Write to Bryan Borich, 3890 50th St., San Diego, CA 92105-3005. (49)

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Next Issue

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No Time to Rest (MegaTraveller)	3.4
Law in the Imperium (MegaTraveller)	4.0
Behind Blue Eyes (MegaTraveller)	3.5
Thymiamata: 1889 (Space: 1889)	3.5
Operation Back Door (2300 AD)	3.5
The Ylii (2300 AD)	3.4
Numberrunner (Shadowrun)	3.7
Tribble Maker (Star Trek)	3.3
Wearing the Steel (GURPS)	3.4
Through the Looking Glass Eye (Cyberpunk)	3.1
Challenge Index	4.4
From the Management	3.7
Letters from our Readers	3.3
Cartoon	3.2
Traveller News Service	3.7
Briefs	3.9
Conventions	3.3
Reviews	3.8
Classifieds	3.6
This issue's cover art	4.2
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